

# FRANK K MERRIWELL'S SKILL



BURT · L  
STANDISH

ZIMMERMAN

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CHS-UB





"The voice of the umpire announced : ' Man is out ! ' " (See page 62)



# FRANK MERRIWELL'S SKILL

BY

BURT L. STANDISH

AUTHOR OF

"Frank Merriwell's Schooldays," "Frank Merriwell's Trip West,"

"Frank Merriwell's Chums," "Frank Merriwell's Foes,"

"Frank Merriwell Down South," etc.

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Frank Merrivell's Skill

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## CHAPTER I.

### DEFENDING THE WEAK.

"Ouch! Leggo!"

"I'll leggo after I've given you a good shaking, you sassy little rascal!"

"Don't! You hurt!"

"I mean to! Call me a stiff, will you! Take that!"  
Slap!—slap!

The two blows, struck with the hand open, fell on the ears of the luckless urchin, causing him to howl with pain.

"Stop it, ye ornery skunk!"

These words came from neither the barefooted boy nor the man who was maltreating him. They were spoken by a tall, gawky, country-looking young fellow dressed in a bicycle suit, who had just issued from a hotel in Fort Worth, Texas, and thus, by accident, came upon the struggle that was taking place before the door.

On the veranda in front of the hotel sat a young man who was laughing as if greatly amused by the struggles and cries of the unfortunate boy.



The other man, who had the boy by the collar, looked up in surprise.

"Hey?" he exclaimed. "Did you speak to me?"

"Yeou bet I did, b'gosh!" was the prompt answer from the tall lad.

"What did you say?"

"I told ye ter stop hittin' that air boy, by thunder! An' I meant it, too!"

"Oh, you did? Well, who are you?"

"I'm Ephraim Gallup, from Varmont, by chaowder! an' I don't like to see a great big, hombly man like yeou a-pickin' on a boy of that size."

"Perhaps you may not like it, but what are you going to do about it?"

"Do? Why, darn my punkins! if yeou don't let that air boy go, I'll jest shin aout of my co't, an' I'll sail inter yeou hotter'n a charge of grapeshot aout of a cannon! That's ther kind of a pansy blossom I be, b'jee!"

At this the man, who still clung to the boy, broke into derisive laughter, which was echoed by the man on the veranda.

"Go fall on yourself!" contemptuously shot back the former. "This kid sassed me, and I'm going to cuff his ears till I make him wish he'd kept his dirty little mouth shut!"

He raised his hand to strike the boy once more. The urchin dodged and held his hands over his ears, appealing to Ephraim Gallup:

"Don't let him do it! He's give me the earache now, an' I had the doctor for it yesterday."

The lank boy lifted a hand and pointed one finger straight at the man.

"If yeou hit that little feller ag'in," he slowly said, "I'll come daown there an' swat you once ur twice so yeou'll see more stars than any 'stronomer ever dis-kivered!"

Biff!—the blow staggered the boy.

Then there was a sudden whirl, as Ephraim seemed to jerk himself out of his coat, the sight of a long, lank form sailing through the air, and the sharp crack of a fist that was driven straight from the shoulder and did not miss the mark.

The movements of the boy from Vermont had been so swift that the man was not prepared to meet the attack, and the very first blow knocked him down, with the barefooted urchin, to whom he was clinging, piled upon his body.

The urchin broke away at once, sprang off, and danced a wild war dance of joy, shouting with delight:

"Jimminy, wasn't that a corker! Oh, my, my, I never seen northin' like that! He! he! he!"

Dazed and astounded, the man who had been struck sat up. He looked at Ephraim Gallup, who was standing near, coat off, fists clinched, ready for further business, and then he scrambled to his feet, uttering fierce exclamations of rage.

"Look out!" screamed the urchin, in sudden alarm—"look out fer him, young feller! That's Dad Morse, the pitcher on the Fort Worth ball team, and he's a scrapper. He'll do ye up."

"Wal, let him do!" came from between the set teeth

of the "Down East" lad. "There is others that can do a little somethin'."

"Give it to him, Dad!" cried the man on the veranda, having arisen to his feet. "Punch the packin' out of him!"

"I will!" snarled the pitcher of the Fort Worths.

He came at Ephraim savagely.

For a moment the two sparred, and Gallup managed to avoid the worst blows, although he received one that made his head ring and cut his lip on the inside.

That was just enough to fully arouse the youth from Vermont. In a moment, Dad Morse, scrapper though he was by reputation, received another surprise.

Ephraim thumped Morse in the wind and then upper-cut him as he doubled over from the effect of the blow.

But he did not stop with that, for he felt that Morse was a bulldog sort of chap, who would fight as long as he could stand, so he hammered the pitcher behind the ear, sending him sprawling on his hands and knees.

More than ever astounded, the ball player called to his companion:

"Hey, O'Connor, come down and kill the fool!"

O'Connor came running down. He had a pimply face and a general tough look.

"I'll t'ump der head off him!" he declared.

When Ephraim turned to meet his new antagonist Morse got on his feet, and the boy from Vermont was between the two. They had him in a bad scrape, and he suddenly realized it.



"Gosh!" he gasped, paling somewhat; "don't I wish I was to hum on the farm!"

But he did not run, or try to get away. He struck at O'Connor, who dodged with the skill of a city tough used to "scrapping," and came back with a staggering body blow.

"Got—to—take—my—med'cine!" gasped Gallup. "I've put my fut inter it naow, an' I can't back aout."

Then he did his level best to fight both of them, but was getting much the worst of it, when another youth came out of the hotel.

It was Frank Merriwell.

An exclamation of astonishment broke from his lips, and then, like a flash, he was bounding down the steps.

"Here, here!" his voice rang out; "what's this mean? Let me get into the game!"

Get into the game he did in a manner that astonished and demoralized Ephraim's two antagonists. His first blow bowled O'Connor over in a twinkling, and then he gave Morse one under the shoulder blade that made that worthy think he had been struck by a pile driver.

By this time the encounter had attracted general attention, and spectators were hurrying to the spot from many directions.

A tall young man came out of the hotel and was in the midst of the fighters in a moment. He grasped Morse by the collar, and barred O'Connor with his arm, as the pimply youth got up and started for Frank, his face purple with rage.

"Here, what's this?" came from the new arrival.

"How do you fellows dare get into a fight just before a home game with the top-enders? You know you are the battery to-day, and we'll be out of it if anything happens to you. I warned you to keep out of trouble."

The speaker was Sam Seekins, manager of the Fort Worth ball team, of the Southern League.

Dad Morse was the star pitcher of the aggregation, and O'Connor was the only man who could "hold" him satisfactorily.

At the first of the season the Fort Worths had started out like pennant winners, but of late they had been dropping games through hard luck, and the night before our story opens there had been a "shake up," at which Seekins had promised further grief for some of the drones of the team if it did not make a general brace.

Out of the three regular pitchers on the team, one had a stiff arm from overwork, and another had hurt himself in trying to slide home with the winning run in the last game. Morse was the only man left in good condition, and Seekins had told him he must take the coming game from the Little Rocks.

Both Morse and O'Connor were quarrelsome and inclined to get into trouble, so the manager had warned them to "walk straight" till after the game was over.

Now he found them engaged in a street quarrel.

Seekins had a fiery temper, and his men were afraid of him. Just now it was plain that he was "mad."

"Why, I've a mind to fine you both!" he cried. "What if the police had seen you and arrested you both! We'd be in a fine scrape this afternoon!"

The men looked sullen, but said nothing.

At this moment some one exclaimed:

"Here comes an officer now!"

Seeing the crowd in front of the hotel, a policeman was hastily approaching.

"Get into the house, and keep out of sight!" hastily came from Seekins. "Git, I tell you!"

Neither Morse nor O'Connor cared to be arrested, and so they made haste to obey. As he passed Frank the pimply-faced catcher gave him a savage look, and muttered:

"Wait till I sees you after der game! Oh, I won't do a t'ing ter you ter-night!"

Frank smiled serenely.

"Perhaps it will be better for you if you mind your own business," he said. "I don't want to fight with you, but I didn't propose to stand still and see two of you jump on my friend."

"If yer stays in town ye'll fight whedder yer wants to or not," growled O'Connor, as he passed on.

"Well, I shall not run away," declared Merriwell.

When the officer came up, Seekins took pains to assure him that nothing more than a "little dispute" had taken place.

The policeman dispersed the crowd.

"We seem ter git inter some kind of a ruction ev'ry where we go," grinned Ephraim, as he put on his coat. "I don't like to fight, but I can't stan' it to see a great live overgrewed man a-pickin' on a little kid, and, b'gosh! I won't do it."



His words won him some applause from the spectators, and one man said :

"That's right. Those chaps are no good anyhow. Morse is a great pitcher, but he's a bully. I am something of a baseball crank, but I'd like to see a clean ball team in this town. I'd much rather not see any than have a team made up of scrappers and toughs. If Seekins wants to keep the game going here he'll have to get rid of Morse."

It happened that Seekins overheard some of this talk. His face grew red, and, rather hotly, he said :

"You may think it is dead easy for a manager to get just the kind of men he likes, but that's because you don't know anything about it. If the Fort Worths didn't win games they wouldn't last, and Morse has won more games for us than all our other pitchers combined. It sounds fine to talk about clean ball players, but they are very nearly as scarce as hen's teeth. Look at the Austins. The town raised a howl about dirty ball players last season, and this year they have a lot of college chaps on their team. Where are they? They are tail-enders and tail-enders they will remain till they fire the college chaps. College ball is not professional ball, and a team made up of college men doesn't stand a show with a professional team."

"Oh, I don't know!" smiled Frank. "There are various opinions about that, sir. I have a little team of my own, made up mostly of college players, and I wouldn't mind putting it up against anything in the Southern League."

Seekins laughed disdainfully.

"You are talking through your hat. Your little team wouldn't score. It would be a farce."

"Perhaps so, but my team wouldn't play the leading comedy rôle. There is a surprise awaiting you any time you feel like tackling us."

"We haven't time to bother with you."

Then Seekins, in anything but a pleasant mood, followed his troublesome battery into the hotel.

Frank looked around for Ephraim, and saw him talking with the barefooted urchin he had defended.

"Gal wants ter see me?" exclaimed the Vermonter, bashfully. "Yeou don't say!"

"Yes, I do," assured the boy, ducking his head several times.

"What in thutteration does she want of me?"

"Wants to thank ye."

"Hey? Thank me? Whut fer?"

"Stoppin' that feller from shakin' me out."

"Wal, that's darned funny! Oh, gosh! I don't want to be thanked! Tell her I'm much obleeged, an' let it go at that."

The country lad was growing more and more confused and alarmed, and he looked as if he contemplated taking to his heels.

The urchin was persistent.

"She's my sister," he said, "an' she's a bully gal. She was awful glad you went for that feller, for he tried to make a mash on her last night, and near scared her to death. She'll feel bad if you don't come to see her."

"Where is she?"

"In the millinery store 'crost the street. See her over there at the door?"

The boy pointed her out.

"Jeeroosalem!" gasped Ephraim. "A millunary shop! An' there must be other female gals in there! I'd ruther face a rigimint of soldiers! I can't do it! Jest tell her that you saw me, but——"

"Oh, go ahead, Ephraim!" laughed Frank. "How do you expect ever to cut any ice with the girls if you are so bashful."

"Cut ice!" gurgled the Vermonter, wiping the perspiration from his face with the back of his hand. "I feel 'zif I'd bin shovelin' coal inter a furnace! I can't go over there, Frank!"

"If you don't she'll think you a chump."

Ephraim groaned.

"Come over with me!" he exclaimed, eagerly. "Yeou know haow to git along with the gals, an' yeou kin help me aout."

"All right," nodded Merry. "Come ahead."

The delighted urchin led the way across the street, and Frank and Ephraim followed. Frank took the Vermonter's arm to keep him from bolting, and he could feel Ephraim trembling.

"Gosh!" whispered Ephraim. "Don't I wish I was to hum on the farm!"

The boy opened the door for them to enter the store, and Frank pushed Ephraim in ahead. In his confusion, the country lad caught the toe of his right foot on his left heel and nearly fell over himself.

When he straightened up he found himself face to



face with a very pretty girl, who was smiling, despite her efforts to repress her merriment.

"'Scuse me!" exclaimed Ephraim, as he snatched off his cap. "My legs are alwus gittin' mixed up with each other an' tryin' to trip me daown. I oughter have 'em cut daown to regerlation length."

This pleased the barefooted lad, who shouted:

"His legs may be long, but he's all right, sis! He's a corker, an' he didn't do a thing to Morse!"

In a frank, unaffected way, the girl offered her hand to the boy from Vermont.

"I saw you just as you went to my brother's aid," she said, and her voice was pleasant and musical. "Tommy is forever getting into scrapes. That man spoke to me last night, and frightened me. I ran away from him, and told Tommy."

"An' I laid fer him," said the boy. "When I saw him come out of the hotel I jes' told him that he was a big stiff. Then, when I wasn't lookin' he jumped down an' caught me."

Ephraim shook the girl's hand, his face being beet-red, while he stammered some words.

"You were very good to stand up for Tommy," said the girl; "but I was afraid you would get the worst of it when I saw both of those men upon you. I was so glad when the other gentleman came out and helped you."

She smiled on Frank, who bowed in his most graceful manner, declaring:

"I am sure neither Mr. Gallup nor myself expected to be repaid in this manner for what we did."

Behind the counter was another girl, who was watching Frank with admiring eyes. She was prettier than the one who had expressed her thanks, and now she found an opportunity to say something:

"Miss Raymond and I were both dreadfully frightened when we saw the fight, and we were so glad when you came out and helped your friend. I think those two men perfectly horrid, and I have been staying away from the ball games lately just because I dislike them so much. It's been an awful sacrifice, too, for I just do love a real good game of ball."

"In that case, perhaps we may have the pleasure of seeing you and Miss Raymond at the game this afternoon," suggested Frank.

"Are you going?"

"Yes. We have stopped over here on purpose to attend the game. There are nine in our party, and we are all going."

"Oh, dear!" sighed the girl behind the counter. "I'm afraid Miss Walker won't let us both go at once. I'd just love to go this afternoon!"

As she said this she gave Frank a most expressive and bewitching look.

"We'll try to get out, won't we, Ida?" said the boy's sister.

"We'll do our best to, Eva," laughed the other; "but I'm awfully afraid we'll fail."

"Gosh!" put in Ephraim; "I hope ye won't. I'd like to see ye ag'in. We've been daown in Arizony and New Mexico, an' it seems kainder good to git into a

country where there's lots of pritty gals. By gum! I don't believe I ever saw so menny pritty gals as there is daown here in Texas. I don't b'lieve there's any hombly ones."

"That is complimentary," smiled Eva; "but of course you must have noticed degrees of beauty among the Texas girls?"

"Never noticed it so much as I have durin' the last three minutes," said the country lad. "Before that I thought they all was pritty, but I've diskivered there's two who are prettier, b'jee!"

Frank felt like clapping Ephraim on the back, for the awkward lad had said this in such an honest way that the girls could not help being flattered.

And it became apparent in a moment that the Vermonter had made a hit. The girls showed this.

Frank and Ephraim did not remain long in the store, but they stayed long enough to find out that the name of the barefooted boy's sister was Eva Raymond, and the other girl's name was Ida Day. When they left the girls promised again to get out that afternoon and attend the ball game, if possible.

"Wal, darn my pertaturs!" exploded Ephraim, as they walked over toward the hotel; "I never struck northin' like that! Them gals is both peaches; but Eva, she's jest a leetle the peachiest."

"You have caught on with her, old man," said Frank; "and she seems like a splendid girl."

"An' yeou've made a hit with t'other one. B'gosh!

I'll jest brace right up to Eva Raymond. Won't ther fellers stare when they see me! It duz seem kainder funny to think of me makin' a mash. Ho! ho! h—o! Darned ef this ain't more fun than hoein' corn on ther farm!"

## CHAPTER II.

### BASEBALL TALK.

As Frank had said, there were nine in the party, and before going further it may be as well to introduce them, individually and collectively.

Frank Merriwell, our hero, was the leader, tall, handsome and a lover of all sorts of manly sports. Frank was a boy who never failed in anything he undertook and was a prime favorite with his friends.

Besides Frank there were Harry Rattleton, his roommate at Yale College, a youth full of fun; Jack Diamond, a boy from Virginia; big and lazy Bruce Browning; Bart Hodge, a chum of many years' standing; Hans Dunnerwust, a comical Dutch lad; Barney Mulloy, a clever Irish youth; Ephraim Gallup, already introduced, and Toots, a colored boy, who, when at home, was attached to the Merriwell household.

Some time before five of the boys, including Frank, had started on a bicycle tour from New York to San Francisco. After many adventures the tour was brought to a triumphant close, and then the boys, along with the others, whom they had met out West, started on the return to the East.

It was Frank's idea to form them into what was called the "Yale Combine." Nine made a good ball team, and as nearly all the boys were athletes, they



started in for sport on the way back, stopping off at any place that promised fun and excitement.

While in the extreme West they had been accompanied by Inza Burrage, a young lady who was very dear to Frank's heart, and her aunt, Miss Gale, but the ladies had left them behind, being unwilling to lose as much time as the boys wished to spend in recreation.

After leaving the millinery store, Frank and Ephraim directed their steps to the hotel. In the baggage-room they found Toots busily at work cleaning up the nine bicycles that belonged to the party, while Bruce Browning, who was on hand to oversee the job, sat in the elevated chair of the bootblack, fast asleep.

"Bet yo' I's gwan teh hab mah pay fo' dis job!" the colored boy was muttering. "Don' yo' mek no mistake 'bout dat. Dem lazy boys don' lek teh clean bi-suckles, but dey allus wants 'em teh shine lek new. An' dey finks I ain't gwan ter do de job right if I don' hab a boss ober me. Dar—dar am de boss!" waving his hand toward Bruce, who was snoring in a fitful manner. "Yah! yah! yah! Ain't dat chile a sleepin' beauty!"

As Frank and Ephraim stopped in the open doorway, Browning began to mutter in his sleep:

"Strawberry shortcake—I smell strawberry shortcake. Yum! yum! I see it—I want it—I will have——"

Then he toppled over and fell out of the chair, striking upon Toots and flattening the colored boy out upon the floor, while the bicycle the darky had been at work upon fell over upon them both.

"Yah!" howled the frightened colored lad. "Dis

chile ain't no strawberry shortcake! W'at yo' tryin' teh do!"

Bruce, awakened in this startling manner, fancied everything was falling down about his ears.

"It's an earthquake!" he shouted "We'll be buried in the ruins! Help! help!"

Frank and Ephraim laughed heartily at the spectacle.

Fearing he would be crushed flat, Toots succeeded in placing one foot against Browning's broad stomach, and then kicked Bruce and the bicycle into the air.

The big fellow came down with a thud on the floor, but the bicycle turned over and cracked the darky on the head as it once more alighted upon him.

"Wow!" howled Toots. "G'way, dar. What yo' tryin' teh do?"

Frank came in and pulled the wheel off the colored boy, fearing the machine might be injured.

Browning sat up, looking dazed and foolish.

"It seems to me that something has happened," he said, bewildered.

"Dat's so," nodded Toots, sitting up and facing Bruce.

It took some time to make clear to Bruce just what had happened, and, when he understood it, he was thoroughly disgusted.

"All the other fellows are taking a snooze in their rooms, while I am down here working," he said. "Oh, that's always the way! I have to do all the work."

Then Frank told of the encounter in front of the hotel and of the two girls in the millinery store.

"That's it!" grunted Bruce. "You have all the fun

fighting and making mashes, while I have to work like a dog bossing this colored rascal."

"Yah! yah!" laughed Toots. "It's piles ob bossin' yo' was doin! Why, Mistah Brownin', yo' fell asleep jes' ez soon as yo' sot do'n in dat chair."

At this moment Sam Seekins, the manager of the Fort Worth ball team, came into the room on his way through. He paused when he saw Frank.

"I have obtained the particulars concerning that little affair in front of the hotel," he said, "and I want to apologize for my men. If Morse was not such a crack-jack pitcher I wouldn't keep him an hour. He is forever bullying somebody and getting into trouble, while O'Connor is a good mate for him. It's no cinch managing a ball team, anyway."

"That's right," smiled Frank. "The manager of a team is sure to get more kicks than anything else."

"Sure. I believe you said that you are the manager of some sort of a team?"

"Oh, that is different. It is a college combination, and we take an interest in athletics of all sorts. We do not make baseball a feature."

"Still you play some?"

"Yes."

"What do you do?"

"Pitch."

"So? And you really think you could play ball with a professional team? Why, my dear young fellow, my men would bat your eye out in one inning."

Frank smiled as if he had received a compliment.

"You mean you think they could. You don't know anything about my pitching."

"What team did you ever pitch for?"

"I pitched for Yale last season."

At this Seekins pricked up his ears a bit.

"For the regular 'Varsity team?"

"Yes, sir."

"I beg your pardon, what's your name?"

"Merriwell."

"Merriwell? It seems to me I noticed your work in the papers. You see, I keep watch of all the games so that I may know who the men are that are coming up. I think I remember that you pitched the deciding game of the series between Yale and Harvard."

"I did."

"And won it?"

"Yes."

"Then it is quite likely you are all right for college work, but you know I claim there is a great difference between college ball playing and professional ball playing."

"After all, it is the difference between clean ball playing and dirty ball playing."

Seekins did not seem to like this, but, as if forced to do so, he slowly admitted:

"Sometimes that is the case, but what I mean is that college players have not the nerve and stamina to hold their own with professionals. They do not know how to work the game for all there is in it, and get the advantage of every point. Compared with professionals,



they are like a young man just starting out in life compared with a veteran successful business man."

"You mean that they lack experience."

"That is the matter with them usually."

"I don't say you are wrong, but you know some college teams play pretty fast ball. I have some good men in my combine. Hodge, who catches, is one of the best backstops I know. He isn't a Yale man, but thinks of entering Yale. Browning, this gentleman here, is my first baseman, and he is a corker when he can keep awake. Diamond, a Yale man, covers second for me, and he is fast. Rattleton, another Yale man, holds down third bag, and I have seen him do some pretty work. My short is an Irish lad who can give some of your professionals points. The outfield is not so fast, and so, much depends upon me. If I can keep them from having much work to do, we are all right."

Seekins looked interested.

"I should say you have a good team to play with some of the local nines through the country," he observed; "but don't think you can cut much ice with professionals."

"That's not settled," said Frank, still calm and serene. "If we had a chance against your Fort Worth team, we'd come pretty near making it hustle."

"Not with a weak outfield, for my men are sluggers, and you would need a strong outfield to support you. I should be sorry for you when they jumped on you if you had a weak outfield behind you."

Frank smiled.

"I don't suppose it occurs to you that, possibly, they might not jump very hard?"

"Hardly. It would take more than a college pitcher to fool them.

Ephraim Gallup had remained quiet as long as he could.

"Gol darn it!" he shouted. "I'll bet a kaow you'd make monkeys of um, Frank! I'd like ter see yeou go up against um, b'gosh!"

At this moment a messenger boy appeared at the door and called:

"Message for you, Mr. Seekins."

The manager of the Fort Worths took the envelope from the boy, signed the book and then lost no time in finding out what the envelope contained.

An exclamation of mingled surprise, anger and dismay broke from his lips.

"Well, this is a great go!" he cried.

Then, after some hesitation, while the boy waited to see if there was an answer, Seekins passed the message to Frank, saying, guardedly:

"If that's straight, you may have a chance to play an exhibition game with us this afternoon."

## CHAPTER III.

### AN AGREEMENT.

"Trouble in team. Short of funds. Can't reach Fort Worth to-day. Game off.

"PAUL KENNA,  
"Manager Little Rock B. B. C."

That was the message Sam Seekins permitted Frank Merriwell to read.

"Confound the luck!" growled Seekins. "We have advertised this game in great shape, claiming the team is strengthened, and Morse will pitch. That's bound to draw a big crowd, and here the Little Rocks have slipped up on us. If we miss playing this game, Fort Worth is likely to become disgusted and throw up the sponge. I tell you that's what I call beastly hard luck!"

"We will give you a game," said Frank, quietly.

"Oh, that wouldn't satisfy the crowd. It would be too tame."

"It might not."

"It would, and still we need the gate money. It will break my heart to cough up if a good crowd turns out and pays admission."

"I will guarantee to give you a hot game, or take no per cent. of the gate money."

"You have lots of confidence, but confidence is not ball playing."

"Confound it!" exclaimed Frank, growing desperate. "I'll wager you a hundred dollars that we beat you!"

"Oh, say, what a bluff!" laughed Seekins, uneasily, seeming to be so troubled over the message that he did not fully heed Frank's words.

"If you think it a bluff, take a look at this long green," came from Merriwell's lips, as he produced a roll of bills. "I will shove up my hundred in the hands of the hotel proprietor, and I dare you to cover it."

This was quite enough to convince Seekins that the boy was in earnest. He looked at Frank intently, and then said:

"I suppose you are expecting your share of the gate money to make you square if you lose?"

"Not on your life! I am ready to play you for one hundred dollars, the winning team to take all the gate money."

"Eh?" grunted the man, lifting his eyebrows. "You must have money to burn!"

"I have money to back any talk I make."

"Well, I don't propose giving up the Little Rocks yet. They might get here on one of the afternoon trains. If they do not come—— Well, I will see you later."

Then he hastily wrote a message on a sheet of paper taken from his pocket. It was as follows:

"PAUL KENNA, MANAGER LITTLE ROCK B. B. C.:

"Must play here at three P. M., or game will be forfeited to Fort Worth. Shall expect you.

"SAM SEEKINS,

"Manager Fort Worth B. B. Club."



"That will bring him if he can raise the funds to reach Fort Worth," said Seekins, as he folded the message and gave it to the boy. "Here, young fellow, here's a quarter for you, and you are to keep your mouth shut. Understand. I don't want it to get out that there is a chance of the Little Rocks failing to be on hand."

"I know my business," replied the boy, as he pocketed the quarter. "If I didn't keep my mouth shut, I couldn't hold my job."

Then he slipped away in a hurry.

Frank did not mean to give up the chance of getting a game with the Fort Worths.

"You'll be in a bad hole if the team doesn't come," he said. "What are you going to do?"

"Well, as a last resort, we may have to play your team."

"Will you play us for a hundred and the gate money?"

"Oh, I don't want to rob you, my boy, so we won't play for the hundred; but if you stick to it, the winning team shall take all the gate money."

"It's a go!"

"Then, if we play, that is settled."

"Not without a written agreement. It is best to have these little matters nailed down in black and white."

"Ho!" laughed Seekins; "you needn't let that worry you. You will never have a show to get your fingers on a dollar of the money."

"I'll have a show if we make the written agreement, and I shall not play otherwise."

"Oh, well, I'll make it; but you won't have any better show after it is made. There is plenty of time after we find the Little Rocks will not get here."

"Not at all. If we are going to make any agreement, let's make it now. That is the best way."

"How can we as long as we do not know whether we will play or not?"

"It seems pretty sure that we'll play, unless you back out."

"Back out! Well, that is rich! Ha! ha! ha!"

"We can make an agreement like this," said Frank. "We will agree to play for the entire gate money in case the Little Rocks do not appear on the field by five minutes past three."

"Oh, yes, we can arrange it that way."

"Then come on. We'll go into the office and fix it up. All I am sorry about is that you won't put up a hundred. That would make it all the more interesting."

As they went out, Frank leading, Seekins following, and Browning slouching along behind, Toots held up both hands, exclaiming:

"Land ob wartermillions! who ebber seen de beat ob dat! Marser Frank am de gre'tes' spo't I ebber saw. He'd jes' lek teh play ball 'gainst de Bustums."

Out in the office Frank quickly drew up an agreement, which he offered Seekins to sign, having first dashed his name at the bottom in bold, black letters.

Seekins read the agreement over, and saw that it was all straight. If the Little Rocks appeared on the Fort Worth ground that afternoon before three innings had been played between the Fort Worths and Merriwell's team the latter was to quit and let the regular game between the league clubs go on.

"That's all right," nodded Seekins, noting with satisfaction that Frank showed no desire to back down and ask for a per cent. of the gate money, but had stated in the agreement that the winning club was to have all the money taken at the door. "I'll sign that."

He placed his name beneath Frank's.

"Now," said Merry, "we want two witnesses."

"Oh, what's the need of all this form?"

"I mean to fix that gate money, and I want to fix it so you can't squeal," said Merriwell, with a cool smile.

The manager of the Fort Worths flushed.

"Don't worry about hearing me squeal!" he quickly exclaimed. "I am not that kind, and, besides, I shall have no occasion for it. If we play you, my young friend from Yale, you will wear a cap to-night that at present would be several sizes too small for you. Hitch on your witnesses."

Frank asked the clerk to put his name on the paper as a witness, which that important worthy condescended to do. Browning was the other witness, and the matter was settled.

"Well, that was a slick piece of work, old man!" laughed Browning, in his lazy manner, when Sam Seekins had departed. "I believe we'll get a game out

of those fellows all right; but you did have a nerve to offer to bet a hundred on the game. We can afford to get along without the gate money."

"Is that the way you look at it?" exclaimed Frank, in mild surprise. "Well, we don't propose to get along without the gate money. We're going to have it."

"Eh!" grunted Bruce. "Why, you don't expect to beat a regular professional team like the Fort Worths?"

"Don't I? Well!"

"But we can't do it, Frank, and you know it."

"I don't know anything of the sort. We can make a big bluff at it, and we may give them the biggest surprise party they ever struck."

"I admire your courage," yawned Browning; "but I must say that, for once, your judgment is away off. We have done no playing together, and——"

"We are all right, although we lack team work. You know you were a smasher with the bat when you used to play, and you can gather in anything that comes within four rods of first. All you'll have to do is to wake up and get into gear. You have seen me pitch."

"Yes," nodded Browning, "you are a pitcher, Merry, but a pitcher can't win the entire game. Where is your catcher?"

"Hodge will catch me."

"Is he any good?"

"Is he? Well, wait and see! I'll go you something he is Yale's backstop before he has been in college more than one season."

"Can he throw?"



"Like a bullet."

"Bat?"

"Like a fiend—at times. He is a little erratic, but when he gets a streak of batting it seems that nothing will stop him."

"I hope he'll have one of those streaks to-day, but Dad Morse is a bird. You know he is left-handed, and he can make the ball look small as a pea when it goes over the plate. The man is too fast for this league, and he would be in one of the bigger leagues if it wasn't for his quarrelsomeness and unreliability."

"Well, I don't think he will scare many of our crowd. We can bat him if we are not afraid of him. We must go right at him, and get him going at the start."

"It's well enough to talk about that, but you know Diamond is not a batter, though he does cover second in great shape. It was his weak batting that kept him off the Yale team."

"I know he is no great batter, but Rattleton can do a fairly good job with the stick, and Barney is a wonder. That Irishman will surprise Mr. Morse."

"Well, what's the use to play with such an outfield as we have?"

"Our outfield might be stronger," admitted Frank; "but the only very weak spot will be in right, the least important field, which Dunnerwust will cover. Gallup can gather in flies to beat the band, and he throws like Sockalexis, the Indian ball player. Toots is a sure catch and a good runner, but a poor thrower. Take them all together, they make an aggregation that's not

to be sneezed at. We may surprise Fort Worth this afternoon."

"I hope so," said Browning, doubtingly; "but I'm glad you didn't put up that hundred."

"Oh, ye of little faith!" muttered Frank, as he walked away.

## CHAPTER IV.

### FRANK USES A WHIP.

It was near noon, and, as Frank started to ascend the stairs of his room, Ephraim came rushing up to him in great excitement.

"Hold on!" panted the boy from Vermont. "I've got somethin' ter tell ye! It's gol darned 'portant, too!"

Frank stopped.

"Why, you are in a perfect sweat, Ephraim," he said.

"Sweat!" exclaimed the Yankee lad. "Who wouldn't sweat! It's 'nuff ter make a man b'ile!"

"What is it? I didn't think it was so unusually hot to-day."

"Hot! Jimminy whiskers! it's whut I've heerd that's made me hot."

"What was it?"

Ephraim looked around to make sure they were alone, and then hastily said:

"I've heerd them two darned sarnips talkin' 'bout havin' fun with them gals, b'gosh!"

"What two 'darned sarnips' and what 'gals'?"

"Why, Morse an' Pimple Face. Them's the ones I mean."

"Who are the girls?"

"Them same gals we saw in ther millunery shop."

"Eva Raymond and Ida Day?"

"Them's um, b'jee!"

"Well, what sort of fun was Morse and O'Connor planning to have with the girls?"

"It's this way: Them gals live quite a ways frum the shop, an' they walk hum to dinner ev'ry day. They go together. Them two sarnips ha' faound it aout, an' they're goin' to stop um on the road."

"This is interesting," exclaimed Frank, pricking up his ears.

"Yes, they're goin' to git a two-seated team, an' go to some place where they can stop the gals. Then they're goin' to make the gals git in an' hav' a ride with um."

"Very fine!" exclaimed Merry, his eyes beginning to flash. "How soon is this to take place?"

"They've gone after the team naow."

"Well, we'll follow them, Ephraim, and take a hand in the little game. What do you say to that?"

"Haow are we goin' ter follow um?"

"On our wheels."

"By gum! we kin do that! I'm in it up to the eyes!"

"Then come on. We have no time to lose."

Frank glanced at his watch, and then led the way to the room where Toots still was working over the wheels. Selecting their wheels, Frank and Ephraim quickly left the hotel.

As they mounted, a two-seated surrey came out from the stable and drove away.

Morse and O'Connor were seated in the surrey.

"We'll ride along after them, and keep them in

sight," said Frank. "If they happen to look around, we will pretend we do not see them, as if we were out taking a little spin, that's all."

This plan was carried out, and it happened that the two ball players were so busy talking that they did not look back. The surrey turned a corner to the left, and then, in a short time, turned again, making it evident the two rascals had ridden away in the wrong direction so their real purpose might not be suspected.

Striking a certain street on the outskirts of the place, they permitted the horse to walk slowly, turning about after going a certain distance, and coming back.

Frank and Ephraim had dismounted at the corner. An old shed stood there, and into that they had stepped, taking their wheels. Through some cracks in the boarding, they were able to watch Morse and O'Connor

Suddenly the men in the carriage were seen to straighten up and appeared interested.

"The gals air comin'!" exclaimed Ephraim, excitedly. "I kin see um!"

The girls were approaching at a rapid walk.

O'Connor, who was driving, turned the team about, and set the horse to walking in the same direction the girls were pursuing.

Frank and Ephraim kept out of sight when the girls passed the shed.

Ephraim was anxious to speak and warn them, but Frank bade him be still.

"Let's see what sort of girls they are," he said. "They may be willing to get in and ride with those fel-



lows, in which case it will be none of our business, and we would be making fools of ourselves to chip in. If they don't want to ride, and there is any trouble, it won't take us long to reach them."

"By gum! yeou're right—yeou're alwus right!"

"Have your bicycle ready to mount. We can ride right out of this shed into the street. We won't lose any time if we have to go. Get ready! The girls are almost up with the team. They're slackening up, as if frightened! They've recognized the fellows! Now the team has stopped! They are speaking to the girls! Morse has leaped out! I'm sure the girls are frightened. They shrink away! He has grasped Eva by the arm—the scoundrel!"

"Come on—b'gosh, we'll lynch 'em!" Ephraim shouted, making a wild lunge to mount his bicycle, but upsetting with a loud crash.

Frank sprang into the saddle, and was out of the shed in a moment, leaving the boy from Vermont to pick himself up and follow as soon as possible.

Wheeling into the road, Merriwell pedaled swiftly toward the team, urged onward by a scream of alarm from one of the girls.

"The brute—the ruffian!" grated Merriwell. "I feel that I could break his worthless neck!"

Not one of the four saw Frank coming till he was right upon them. It did not seem that he slackened the speed of his wheel to dismount, but, letting it go, he leaped to the ground.

"Oh, help me!" gasped Eva.

"I will!" cried Frank.

Then—smack!—his fist struck just under the ear of Dad Morse, and he caught the little milliner's clerk in his arms as the man was sent staggering, gasping, cursing, nearly falling.

"Oh! oh!" cried both the frightened girls.

O'Connor gave an exclamation of astonishment and a snarl of rage.

"It's dat fly kid!" he cried. "Dern me eyes!"

Frank paid but very little attention to either of the men, but spoke calmly and reassuringly to the girls.

"It's all right, young ladies," he declared. "You need have no alarm. Mr. Gallup is coming, and I think we'll be able to take care of you."

Morse recovered with astonishing swiftness, leaped toward the carriage, and snatched out the whip.

"I'll fix the whelp!" he snarled.

Swish!—the whip cut through the air.

Regardless of the girl Merriwell was supporting, the man had struck with all his strength, and the the lash curled around the bodies of both lad and maid.

As the lash stung through her thin clothes, Eva uttered a scream of pain.

Like a flash, Frank released her and turned on the brute.

Morse had lifted the whip for another blow.

"I'll leave the mark on yer face!" he almost shouted.

He did intend to scar Frank's face, for which he struck with all his strength.

Frank ducked and leaped sideways, escaping entirely.

Then, like a young panther, he sprang at the man, grappled with him, wrenched the whip from his hand.

"Two can play at this game!" cried Merry, with that peculiar laugh that was characteristic with him in times of great danger or excitement. "You struck the young lady, and you'll apologize to her, or I'll cut the clothes off your back with this whip."

Swish—spat! swish—spat!

Without mercy and with all the strength he could command, Frank swung that whip. It cut through the air, it twined about the man's arms and shoulders, it doubled him up with pain and fury.

"Oh! oh!" screamed the famous pitcher of the Fort Worth team, as he danced about. "Stop it! Oh, Satan take you! I will kill you if I get hold of you!"

"I haven't a doubt but you would enjoy doing so, but you will not get hold of me," said Merriwell, as he continued to lay on with all his strength. "Are you ready to apologize humbly to the young ladies?"

"Stop, I say! Apologize—nuthin'! Ow—wow—wow! I'll shoot ye—I will!"

Morse's hand went around to his hip pocket. Not knowing but the man carried a revolver, Frank watched him closely, still using the whip.

But the man was bluffing. He did not have a revolver, and he had hoped to frighten Merriwell by his threat and movement.

"Ye-ow!" he screamed, trying to dodge and run, only to find Merriwell had dodged around and was heading him off. "Oh, I'll fix you for this! Oh, furies! Don't hit me again!"

"Down on your knees before these girls!" came relentlessly from Frank, "down and apologize!"

"Never!"

"Then you get it harder!"

He did. It seemed that new strength came into the arm of the lad with the whip, and he piled on the blows with added swiftness.

"Stop him, Con!" begged Morse. "He's cutting me all to pieces! He is killin' me! Ow—wow! Stop him quick!"

But O'Connor was having all he could do to keep the horse from running away, as the animal was frightened by the sound of the whip and the cries of the man who was being lashed.

"Whoa!" he roared. "Wot's der matter wid yer! Stan' still! Wot yer tryin' ter do jumpin' roun' dat way?"

Morse thought his friend was speaking to him, and it made him furious.

"What's ther matter with you!" he howled back. "Ow thunder! You come down an' try it! Blazes! You won't stan' still long! You're doin' a nice job settin' still while I'm bein' cut up this—— Murder! Wow! wow! wow!"

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed Ephraim Gallup, who had arrived on the scene and was in position to look out for both girls. "Haw! haw! haw! That's ther gol darndest funniest sight I've seen sence I left ther farm! Give it ter ther critter, Frank! Make him squeal, drat him!"

"Will you apologize?" demanded Frank, putting extra vim into a blow as he asked the question.

"Apologize! Whoop!"

"Get down on your knees!" commanded Frank, striking again.

Morse tried to dodge and run away, but he sprang against the horse, which snorted and reared, backing the carriage around into the gutter, and nearly upsetting O'Connor.

The recoil flung the man backward, and he went down in the dust. When he struggled to his knees, Frank Merriwell stood over him with the whip uplifted, saying:

"Stay right there till you apologize, or I'll give it to you worse than anything yet! Don't try to get up!"

"Don't—don't hit me!" pleaded Morse, beginning to weaken.

"I shall if you try to rise."

"Then I won't try."

"You must apologize."

The man gave Frank a look of unutterable hatred.

"What shall I say?"

"Apologize for insulting these young ladies and for striking Miss Raymond with the whip."

"All right, I apologize, but——"

"That is not satisfactory. You must apologize in a different manner than that."

"I dunno wot ter say," sullenly growled the humiliated rascal.

"Then I think I'll use the whip till you find out."

But when it seemed that Frank was going to lay on again, Morse quickly said:

"I'll do the best I can. Young ladies, I beg yer pardon if I have insulted yer. I'm sorry fer it."



"Is that satisfactory, Miss Raymond?" asked Frank.

"Oh, quite so!" said the girl, quickly, still shivering and nervous.

"Is it satisfactory to you, Miss Day?" blandly asked Frank.

"Yes, yes!"

"All right, then," said Merriwell, coolly. "Get up, Morse—get into that carriage. Move about it, too! Now, don't stop till you get out of sight."

The man hastened to get into the carriage. Then he started to say something, but Frank started forward with the whip, and he caught the reins out of O'Connor's hands, yelling to the horse:

"Git up—git!"

Away shot the animal, having been held in restraint with some difficulty, and Frank laughed to see the brave mashers depart.

"That was quite satisfactory," he said, coolly. "I am inclined to think they will not bother you again, girls."

At a distance both Morse and O'Connor turned to shake their fists at the little group and yell back profane threats of vengeance.

"How can we ever thank you for what you have done?" cried Ida Day.

"How, indeed?" chimed in Eva Raymond.

"We did not do it for thanks," said Frank, gallantly. "It was a pleasure and satisfaction to be able to save you from being annoyed by two such rascals."

"That's right, b'jee!" nodded Ephraim. "We think we're confaounded lucky to git the chaine."

"But I don't see how it was that you happened to come along here just in time," said Ida. "Was it by chance?"

"No," answered Frank. Then he told them how Ephraim had overheard the ball players plotting to stop them on the road, and they had followed Morse and O'Connor.

"Oh, I don't know what we should have done if you hadn't!" fluttered Eva. "I never was so scared in all my life. Why, he jumped out and grabbed me by the arm, and was going to force me to get into the carriage."

By this time a number of persons, who had heard Morse's cries and seen something of the encounter, were approaching hastily. Frank knew they would ask a number of unpleasant questions, and so he urged the girls to hasten toward their homes.

"We will ride along on our wheels and keep watch over you," he said; "so you will not be troubled again."

He knew well enough that there was no danger that Morse or O'Connor would make a further attempt to molest the girls that day, but the girls were still trembling and frightened, so he believed it best to ride along and make them feel sure they were safe from harm.

This was carried out, the boys leaving Eva and Ida at the door of the cottage where the former lived.

"I don't feel as if I ever wanted to see a ball game again if those fellows are to play," said Ida.

"Nor I," agreed Eva; "but we have asked to go out,

and we may as well go this afternoon. Shall we see you gentlemen at the grounds?"

Both Frank and Ephraim assured the girls that they would be there, and then, lifting their caps, mounted and rode back toward the hotel.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE GAME BEGINS.

At a quarter to three o'clock that afternoon a steady stream of people was pouring through the entrance to the Fort Worth ball ground.

At three o'clock one of the largest audiences of the season had assembled to witness the expected game between the locals and the Little Rocks.

The word had gone out that Morse was going to pitch. Now Morse was not liked personally in Fort Worth, but he had pitched on the Little Rock team the year before and had slaughtered the Fort Worth batteries. On this occasion Fort Worth was looking for revenge. Morse was a bulldozer. It was his delight to "nail" a batter with a swift ball, and scare him, if possible, so he would always be afraid after that. He had "nailed" several Fort Worth men, and now Fort Worth was out to see him return the dose to Little Rock.

But Little Rock was not on hand. The crowd looked in vain for the Arkansaw men. Where were they?

Rumors were started and the crowd became restless. Fort Worth's team was in the field practicing. They seemed quite unconcerned.

"Where is Little Rock?" howled a stentorian voice.

"Play ball!" bawled a man on the bleachers.

Sam Seekins, in uniform, for he played as well as managed, came in from first base, and asked the scorer what time it was. The scorer looked at his watch, and said it was one minute past three.

Then Seekins looked around for the umpire, and found him.

"Call up the game," said Seekins.

"Eh?" said Dorsey, astonished. "Where is Little Rock?"

"Little Rock is in the soup. Call up the game. My men are on the field, and I propose to take this game by forfeit."

"But what if Little Rock shows up late?"

"She won't."

The manner in which Seekins said this convinced Umpire Dorsey that Seekins knew what he was talking about, so he walked out behind the home plate and cried :

"Play ball!"

The spectators looked on, greatly puzzled.

Seekins had trotted down to first, and Morse walked out into the box.

Fort Worth's team was on the field, and the men were in their positions.

Dorsey broke open a square box, took out a ball that was covered with tinfoil, removed the latter and then tossed the snowy sphere down to "Dad."

Morse, chewing gum and grinning, with a glove on his right hand, caught the ball.

"What are you going to do with it?" cried a spectator.



"Strike out the first batter," replied Morse.

Then he pitched the ball over the plate, and Dorsey cried :

"The Little Rocks failing to appear, this game is forfeited to Fort Worth, 9 to 0."

Then there were cries of dismay from the crowd, which began to move, as if to leave the ground.

"We want our money back!" shouted scores of voices. "Give us our money!"

Sam Seekins ran in from first to home plate.

"Wait a moment, ladies and gentlemen," he cried, in a loud voice. "I am very sorry to disappoint you to-day, but it is not the fault of our team. We expected Little Rock to appear up to five minutes ago," he lied. "Then I received a message that said it would be absolutely impossible for them to get here."

"Somebody must have told them Morse was going to pitch," yelled a small boy.

"But you need not be deprived of seeing a hot game of ball, if you care to remain," Seekins went on. "This forenoon I was challenged to play a college team on this ground for one hundred dollars a side and the gate money. At that time I was unable to accept the challenge, having no open date; but now I do accept it, and, if Frank Merriwell's Yale team is here, we will play a game."

"Hurrah!" cheered an enthusiast. "Yip! yip! ye-e-e-e-ea!"

"All those who do not care to remain and see the game, may leave at once and receive their money at

the gate," cried Manager Seekins. "Here comes the Yale crowd!"

Out from the dressing-rooms under the grand stand trotted nine lads in uniform suits, on the breast of each being a huge white Y. They made a good appearance, and some of the disgusted ones who had started to leave the grounds stopped, their curiosity aroused.

"They have a crust to challenge our team to play for a hundred dollars a side and the gate money!" said one man.

"That's right!" growled another. "Why, our boys can eat that crowd. What can they do against Morse?"

There was some growling, but not a dozen persons left the ground.

The Fort Worth team came in from the field and permitted Merriwell and his men to go out for practice.

Frank batted to the infield, and one of the Fort Worth men batted to the outfield. Seekins had coached his men not to give the outfield men any difficult balls, for he feared they might show up so bad the spectators would be disgusted.

Gallup showed up very well, and Toots dropped but one fly. Hans, however, did not seem able to hold anything.

The infield, directed by Frank, was picking up everything cleanly and doing some excellent throwing.

After a short amount of practice Frank announced that he was ready to begin the game.

The Fort Worths decided to take their "ins" first,

and Merriwell walked down to the pitcher's box, while Hodge got into position behind the plate.

"This is going to be a regular farce," declared one of the spectators in the left side bleachers. "Those fellows are a lot of boys, and I don't believe they can play ball, anyhow. If this game is rotten, it will be my last for this season."

"Mine, too," declared another. "I have been bunced enough. There is no reason why Fort Worth should not be at the head of the league. We are paying money enough to have the best team in the South."

"That's right," agreed a third. "We're a good hundred over the salary limit and still we've been losing games, right along. There's a nigger in the woodpile."

"Seekins has three new men in the field to-day."

"Who are they?"

"Prince, the shortstop; Lorrimer, in center field, and Hemming, on second. That's what has helped bring out this crowd, together with the report that Morse would pitch."

"The game is going to begin!"

"Who is that young fellow in the box for the strangers?"

"He is the manager of the team. His name is Merriwell."

"Well, he is a fine looking fellow. He is built just about right, but it's ten to one he'll be hammered out of the box in a hurry."

"Here they go!"

Then the voice of the umpire rang out clearly:

"Play ball!"

The first man "up" was Francis, Fort Worth's third baseman. He was a tall, wiry fellow and a heavy hitter.

Standing with the ball in his hand, Frank surveyed Francis closely, wondering what kind of ball would fool him.

Merry decided to try an out-drop, keeping it away from the plate to start with.

Frank had a splendid delivery, without unnecessary flourishing, and, having decided how he would start off with the first batter, he sent in a hummer.

To Frank's astonishment Francis reached out with his long arms and long bat and cracked the ball when it was at least a foot beyond the plate, sending it down into right field for a single.

Hans raced in and fell over the ball, but managed to pick it up and throw it to second after a time.

"Oh, my! oh, my!" roared a loud voice from the bleachers. "Is this a game of ball—or what? Get onto the toad in the right!"

"What will happen to that poor pitcher!" shrieked another. "It's too bad—too bad!"

Frank laughed, seeming not in the least ruffled. He had met with a surprise in Francis, but he resolved not to show it.

In the grand stand Frank saw two girls who were watching him with eager interest.

They were Eva Raymond and Ida Day.

The next batter to come up was Dix, Fort Worth's

right fielder, a man who was kept on the team for his batting.

Frank felt sure Francis would try to steal second, not knowing anything about Hodge's throwing.

Seekins himself went down on the coach line. He smiled pityingly on Frank.

"Too bad! too bad!" he cried.

Frank smiled back.

"This is the beginning of the game," he muttered, softly. "Save your pity, Mr. Seekins. You may feel differently later on."

Hodge came up under the bat, adjusting mask and protector.

Francis began to dance around first, and Frank snapped his left foot out of the box and jerked a ball over to Bruce so suddenly that the big fellow nearly caught the man. It was a close decision, but the umpire declared Francis safe.

Bruce tossed back the ball, and then, as Francis started off, Frank sent it back in a manner that caused the base runner to nearly break his neck getting back to the bag.

"Keep them throwing it," cried Seekins. "They'll lose it in a minute. Here's where we make a hundred to start off with."

But Frank suddenly faced the batter, having received Bart's signal for a high rise, and delivered the ball.

As Frank had expected, Francis attempted to go down to second on the first pitch. He was a swift runner, but Hodge took time to make a sure throw, and



he sent the ball shooting down to second straight as an arrow and swift as a bullet.

Diamond had been playing off the bag, but Hodge threw for second, regardless of Jack, and threw low.

The Virginian came in on a run to cut off Francis.

"Slide! slide!" shrieked Seekins.

Forward the runner flung himself, sliding hands first for the bag.

The umpire had taken his place behind Frank as soon as Francis reached first, and now he, too, scooted down to second to see the play.

Diamond took the ball on the run, getting it about two feet from the ground, and punched it into Francis' back as the latter slid, nailing the man right there, and holding him without blocking at least a foot from the base.

"Runner is out!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### A GREAT THROW.

The voice of the umpire sounded clear and distinct.

There was a sudden silence, and then came a stir in the great crowd of spectators. A cheer went up.

"Well done, Yale! That was easy!"

"This may be a ball game after all!"

"That catcher can throw!"

"You bet! He's all right!"

Frank smiled serenely once more, turned to Seekins, and winked tantalizingly.

"Too bad! too bad!" he said.

"Well, that was pretty good for kids," admitted the manager of the Fort Worths, somewhat crestfallen, as Francis picked himself up from the ground, brushed the dust off his clothes, and disgustedly walked off the diamond.

"You have a good man behind the plate, Merriwell, but he isn't the whole team. I am sorry for you. You are bound to see grief."

"Don't let that turn your hair gray," said Merry, coolly. "I am bound to see the gate money after the game."

"If you do, you will see it when I am putting it into my pocket."

"Oh, I don't know! You're not so warm, old man."

Dix was waiting impatiently. He felt like smashing

out a home run. He was confident that he could do it, but he was to discover that too much confidence is sometimes quite as bad as too little.

Frank's first pitch had been called a ball, being too high. With no man on first, he took his position in the box, and received his signal from Hodge, who called for a low in-shoot.

In another moment, like a flash, Frank sent the ball flying over the inside corner of the plate.

Dix swung for it, missed it and was thrown off his feet by the force of his own blow.

The crowd laughed.

"Better luck next time!" shouted a voice.

"If you'd hit it, they never could have found the ball," came from another direction.

Bart called for an outcurve, but Frank shook his head. Then the signal for a slow drop was given and accepted.

As if he intended to drive the ball with all the speed he could command, Frank made the delivery.

The ball seemed to hang in the air, and Dix, believing it was a straight one, started to swing for it. Too late he saw it was slow. He could not stop his bat, nor could he get it down under the ball, so he missed entirely.

"Two strikes!" cried the umpire.

Dad Morse was watching Merriwell closely, scowling in an ugly manner. He shook his head a bit, growling:

"He's tricky; but I'll fix him the first time he faces

me. He's all the pitcher they've got, and we can have fun with him as soon as he is knocked out!"

"Wait," advised O'Connor. "If we can git onter der duck, it will hurt him more dan anyt'ing ter bat him all over der lot."

"Yer never'll bat him very hard, unless he gets rattled."

"Oh, I don't know! He's not such a much."

"Wait and see. You follow Dix."

"An' I'll make der kid sick."

Morse looked doubtful, but expressed a hope that O'Connor might be able to do so.

Up in the grand stand were two breathless girls who were watching the game with the most intense interest.

"Isn't he handsome, Eva?" whispered Ida Day. "Just look at him now! I think he is perfectly splendid!"

"So do I," returned Eva Raymond; "but I want to see him do something, and they have put him so far away out there in the field."

"Put him so far away! Who are you talking about?"

"Why, Mr. Gallup, of course!"

"I mean Frank Merriwell."

"Oh!"

"Of course!"

Then both laughed.

"Mr. Gallup is awfully awkward, Eva," said Ida.

"I don't know about that. He is just as brave as he can be. Remember how he stood up for Tommy. I think he is rather good-looking, too. I know he isn't

handsome, but he has a good face, and it is so honest. I always thought I should feel like making fun of a real Down East Yankee, but I don't feel that way a bit about him."

"Gracious!" exclaimed Ida. "And you are the girl who can have the handsomest fellow in Fort Worth if you want him. All the good-looking fellows are after you."

"Perhaps so, but I'm like my sisters, I judge. Both of them married homely men, and took them instead of handsome fellows. They have the best husbands in Texas, too."

"Well, you are queer!"

"Perhaps I am, but there is something about Ephraim Gallup that makes me like him more than any fellow I ever met before."

"Look—Mr. Merriwell is going to pitch again!"

Disgusted by his ill success, Dix was desperate. He felt that he must make a hit, or be eternally disgraced. His jaws were set in a determined manner, and he fully understood that it was not going to be such an easy thing to hammer Merriwell.

Frank was watching Hodge's mouth. Bart was up under the bat, and putting his hands up to each side of his face, he signaled for a high, swift ball.

For one moment Frank hesitated, feeling for some reason that Dix could hit a high ball. Still, he knew Bart had good judgment, and he resolved to make the ball so high that there would be little chance that the batter would get it if he went after it.

Like a flash, Merry sent in a straight one, putting it above Dix's shoulders.

The batter went for it.

And got it!

With all his strength he smote the ball, and a great shout went up when the sphere sailed away toward center field.

In an instant Frank saw it was going far over Gallup's head.

"A home run!" howled the spectators.

"Back, Ephraim—back!"

The cry came from Frank, but Gallup had turned and was racing back toward deepest center.

Dix seemed to fly down to first, crossed the bag at wonderful speed, made for second, seeming to have wings attached to his feet.

The spectators stood up and shouted. The bleachers broke into a hoarse roar, and a shriller note came from the grand stand. It was plain there were plenty of baseball enthusiasts in Fort Worth.

Frank's heart sank, for he saw that Gallup would not be able to reach the ball. It looked like a safe drive for four bags.

"I'll know better than to give that man a high swift ball again!" muttered Frank, regretfully.

Over Gallup's head went the ball, and over second base sped the runner.

Down by first Seekins was shouting, but his voice was drowned in the roar of the crowd. Over by third another coacher was making frantic gestures for Dix to keep right on and make a home run of it.



Ephraim's long legs took him after the ball as swiftly as possible, but it raced away from him. He flung himself at it—fell on it.

The spectators shrieked with laughter. It was very funny. Why, that long, lank chap out in the field couldn't play ball no matter how hard he tried. He was sure to fall over himself. It was all right now; Dix was sure to get home without a struggle.

Up came Gallup, as if he had rebounded from the ground. He got his long legs under him and whirled around as if on a pivot.

He had the ball!

But Dix had crossed third and was tearing up the dust along the line that led down to home plate.

What a snap! It was impossible to stop that score now. Morse was grinning and chewing gum, while O'Connor was shouting in his ear:

"Dat's wot'll break Merriwell's heart! Oh, he'll fall to pieces now! We'll kill der fly kid!"

Of course Gallup must throw to Diamond on second, and Diamond must catch the ball, turn, throw it home. By that time Dix would be safe over the plate, and Fort Worth's first score would be a home run off Frank Merriwell.

Of course—— Wait a minute! Of course nothing! What was Gallup trying to do? He must be crazy!

With all his strength, Ephraim threw the ball. It did not rise high in the air. At no time was it more than forty feet from the ground.

But the boy from Vermont had not thrown to Dia-

mond. He had made an attempt to throw home from deepest center—a supposedly impossible feat.

A sudden hush came over the spectators as they saw the ball come sailing through the air like a shot, seeming to gain speed till it had passed over the head of Jack Diamond.

The bleachers had stopped roaring, and the grand stand was silent. Seekins was gasping for breath. The other coacher seemed paralyzed with astonishment.

Hodge was standing two feet in front of the home plate and somewhat to one side toward third, his eye on the ball, his manner calm and confident.

Seekins saw the ball was bound to reach home without touching the ground, and he threw off the lethargy that had come over him.

“Slide!” he shrieked at the runner, “slide, slide!”

Dix had seen the ball go over Gallup’s head, and this cry to slide astounded him. He had not dreamed there could be any danger that he would not score easily. Seekins must be fooling; he must be trying to make fun for the crowd. What was the use to slide?

Then came the voice of the other coacher howling: “Slide, you fool—slide!”

What was the matter with him? Well, why not slide and have some sport out of it? It was bound to be a foolish game anyway.

Dix slid. He did it gracefully and easily. As he went down, he saw Hodge gather something in. It couldn’t be the ball! Then he felt a thump on the back, just before his hands reached the plate, and he was

stunned with astonishment when the voice of the umpire announced:

"Man is out!"

Stunned—yes! He was so astonished that he lay on the ground, looking up over his shoulder.

Hodge had a ball, but it couldn't be the one batted far out into deepest center. There was some "monkey business" here, and Dix felt sure of it.

For a little the spectators were silent, as if they, too, who had witnessed the wonderful throw, were unable to believe it had actually been done.

Then came a roar from the bleachers—a scream from the grand stand. Hats waved in the air, and handkerchiefs fluttered.

Roar! roar! roar! It was not cheering, but it was a wild burst of astounded admiration. Never had such a wonderful throw been made on that ball ground.

"What's the matter with longlegs!" howled a voice that could be heard above the riotous tumult.

"He's all right!" howled back another voice.

Then there was another roar—wilder, louder, more intense.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE GAME BECOMES INTERESTING.

"Sign him, Seekins!"

Thus shouted an enthusiast from the grand stand.

And in the grand stand were two girls who were overcome with delight.

"There!" exclaimed Eva; "he has done something now!"

"My! my!" came from Ida. "How could he throw so far and so straight? Hear them cheer him!"

Sam Seekins stood with his hands on his hips, staring out at Ephraim, as if he wondered what sort of an arm the Yankee lad possessed.

Dad Morse stopped grinning, and Con O'Connor scratched his pimply chin and growled:

"Dat beats der band!" said O'Connor. "I bet dat chap can get der world's record fer t'rowin'."

"I wonder if all them chaps can throw as well as the catcher an' center-fielder?" said Morse, angrily.

"If dey can, dey're birds! But we're gettin' onter Merriwell's curves all right. Didn't I tell yer! We'll t'ump him all over der lawn directly. Everybody can hit him. Watch me."

It was O'Connor's turn to bat, and he picked up a stick.

Dix had crawled to his feet and gone to the bench in disgust, "kicking like a steer." He felt that he had

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been robbed of a sure home run, and the trick had been done by the greatest jay he ever saw on a ball field.

Frank was well satisfied, even though the first two men up had secured hits. The work of Hodge and Gallup had convinced the Fort Worth players that the "Yale Combine" was not so poor as they had thought at first. The next man to get first on a single would not be so eager to try to steal second, and when Gallup secured a ball in center the man on third would hesitate about trying to score on it.

But Frank resolved to use his own judgment on the kind of balls he would pitch in the future. He called Bart down, and told him he would signal, but instructed Hodge to keep up a pretense of signaling, so the opposing players would not tumble to the fact that Frank was doing this part of the work.

O'Connor had decided from the batting of the two men before him that Merriwell was one of the "fresh" college pitchers who put them all over the plate when he was able to find it. Such a pitcher, as a rule, is "fruit," so Con decided to pick out a good one and break Frank's heart.

The first ball did not suit him, but the umpire called a strike, somewhat to his disgust.

The second looked like a "bird."

He went after it, and, to his surprise, missed it by a foot.

"Two strikes!" cried the umpire.

Then O'Connor made a discovery, for the next three were "coaxers," not one of them where he wanted it.

He found that Merriwell was not inclined to put everything over.

And now it stood two strikes and three balls. The next pitch would decide it.

Frank saw that O'Connor was more than eager to "hit it out." He felt sure he could "find" the ball, and he did not want to get his base on "four."

This was the time that Merry decided to work his slow drop. If O'Connor hit it, he was pretty sure to pop up a little one to the infield, but it was a difficult ball to hit at all, all the more so from the fact that Frank had been using speed altogether on the batter.

Frank assumed a position for delivery that meant he was going to pitch a drop, and Browning, Diamond and Rattleton, who had played with him in games and practice at Yale, understood the sign quite as well as Hodge.

With exactly the same movement he had used in pitching the swift balls, Frank sent in another that seemed to hang back in the air and then went down toward the ground in a most astonishing manner.

He had made no mistake, for O'Connor went after it, fanned, and threw down his bat with an exclamation of rage.

Plunk!—the ball struck in Bart's big glove. Whiz!—it went flying down to first.

Browning lazily gathered it in.

"Batter out!" called the umpire.

It was over and Fort Worth had failed to score in their half of the first inning, although they had started off to "make a hundred."



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Three men had come to the plate, and, although two of them obtained hits, no more came up. All three were out, and the last man had fanned.

The spectators, not a few of whom were somewhat "sore" on the locals, were rejoiced. They expected that Fort Worth would win, but were glad to see the strangers putting up such a game, and gave the Yale crowd a hearty burst of applause when they came in from the field.

"Vale," grinned Hans, with satisfaction, "dot peen der time when we done der tricks, poys."

"Begorra! it's littlle ye done, ye Dutch chaze!" said Barney.

"Vot I said to you?" cried Hans. "I got me hold der pall uf, und dot vas more as you done, alretty yet."

"Ye fell all over th' ball gettin' av it."

"Und der pall fell all ofer Efy, too; but he didn't done a thing to dot runners. Yaw! Dot peen almost as goot as I nefer done."

As Ephraim approached the bench he was given a round of applause.

"What's the matter with the Yankee?" shouted a voice.

"He's all right!" roared back another. "Hooray for him!"

Then the bleachers cheered, and there was a fluttering of handkerchiefs from the grand stand.

The face of the boy from Vermont was crimson, but he grinned in a happy manner.

Frank came in at Ephraim's side, giving his hand a squeeze, and saying:

"It was the finest throw I ever saw, old man! You're all right, and you have caught the crowd."

"Gosh!" exploded Ephraim. "I never felt so thunderin' foolish in all my life! Whut be they makin' such a taouse abaout? It makes me wish I was to hum on the farm."

"See!" said Frank, "look near the center of the grand stand. There are our Fort Worth friends, and they are waving their handkerchiefs to us. You are a hero this afternoon, Ephraim."

"Wal, it's the fust time I ever was, an' I don't know as I like ther feelin' of it."

Fort Worth took the field, Morse going into the box. Then some of the new friends the Yale Combine had made shouted for Seekins to take Morse out.

"Give the boys a show!" cried a big man, standing up in the midst of the bleachers. "What's the use to spoil the game by putting Dad in? They can't hit him."

"Take him out! take him out!" cried many voices.

Seekins made a gesture that brought silence to the assembly.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, clearly, "Morse has been advertised to pitch to-day, and so he will pitch at least one inning. After that, I think we'll take him out, for he'll not be needed."

This silenced and satisfied those who had started in to "root" for Merriwell's team.

"So that's what Seekins thinks," muttered Frank. "Boys, we must do our best to make him change his mind this inning. Go right at Dad, and don't be afraid

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of him. Fort Worth may get a greater surprise in this half than it did in the other."

Browning was the first batter. He picked out a stick, and, as he started toward the plate, Frank softly said to him:

"Line it out, Bruce. He will put it over for you, and use speed. You can eat speed. Meet it fair—that's all."

The big fellow nodded, as if he felt too lazy to speak. He loafed up to the plate.

Already the crowd had caught on to the fact that Browning was a tired sort of fellow, and it cried:

"He'll never be able to dodge one of Dad's in-shoots. Look out and do not hit him, Dad."

Morse grinned in his nasty way, his jaws working over a chew of gum. He stood up facing first base, his gloved right hand concealing the ball in his left.

In a moment Frank Merriwell was on his feet, starting forward, pointing straight at the pitcher, as his voice rang out clear and plain:

"Make him show that ball before he delivers, Mr. Umpire—make him show it! He has no right to conceal it that way."

For an instant the grin vanished from Dad's face, and there was a gleam of fury in his small eyes. He made a gesture as if he would throw the ball at Frank.

"I'll show it to you!" he muttered. "I'll bore you with it!"

"If you throw it at me. I'll agree to break your head with a bat!" said Merriwell, coolly, showing not the least sign of fear.

This was something Dad Morse was not accustomed to, as he was a bully, and he had often terrorized opposing players on the field. It was his pleasure to intimidate a young college player, and he had fancied the game would work with this aggregation of boys.

Some of the spectators hissed Morse. Although Fort Worth was intensely partisan in most cases, and Morse was considered a good man for the team, it did not like the bullying pitcher personally, and it felt that the youthful strangers should be used like gentlemen as long as they conducted themselves in a gentlemanly manner.

The umpire compelled Morse to show some of the ball before pitching, which he did in a sullen manner.

Browning was ready, and, after balancing himself, with his right foot forward, Morse suddenly shot in a high one with his greatest speed.

Browning seemed to swing his bat carelessly almost before the ball left the pitcher's hand. He found it all right, and it went sailing away over the head of Prince, Fort Worth's new shortstop. Prince leaped into the air for it, but did not touch it.

Then Bruce awoke, cheered by the roar that came from the surprised and delighted spectators, and ran after the manner that had once made him famous on the Yale freshman football team.

Over first he shot, at the command of Rattleton, who was coaching, and kept on for second, which he got safely without having to slide.

A two-bagger off the first ball Morse pitched was something wonderful, and it was not strange that those

who had taken a fancy to the Yale crowd whooped with joy.

Dad continued to grin and chew gum, but his face had grown pale with anger, for all that he tried to conceal it.

"Yow! yow! yow!" yelled Rattleton, as he danced about down by first; "what's the batter with Mowning—I mean what's the matter with Browning?"

"Shimminy Gristmas!" cried Hans, in delight. "You wait till I done dot tricks! Oh, we peen der poys to blay pall!"

Although it is not the custom to place the battery near the head of the batting list, Frank had run Hodge in as second man, and given the third place to himself. He had done this to make the head of the list as strong as possible.

Bart danced up to the plate, his face looking grave enough, but a light of satisfaction in his black eyes.

For all of his grin, Morse looked ugly. He snapped his jaws over the gum, and then shot a ball at Bart.

Hodge dropped to the ground, and avoided it.

"You hadn't better hit me!" he flashed, as he picked himself up. "If I think you do it intentionally, I'll get back at you if the crowd mobs me!"

Morse continued to grin, but said nothing. He believed he had frightened one of the players.

But Dad's nerve had been ruffled by Browning's hit, and he put in two more that were not good, getting three balls straight called on him.

Hodge did not seem at all anxious. He let a good one go past, and heard the umpire call a strike. Then

came another that looked good, but it proved to be too high, and Bart did not swing.

"Four balls," decided the umpire.

Bart tossed aside the bat and trotted down to first.

Then, looking Morse in the face and laughing quietly, Frank Merriwell selected the same bat Browning had used, and advanced to the plate.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### HOT WORK.

Although he continued to grin, the eyes of Dad Morse gleamed with hatred most intense. He longed to hit Frank in the head with the first ball he pitched.

"I'd like ter kill him!" he mentally exclaimed.

Then, of a sudden, he sent in a ball with all the force he could command. At the start it looked like a straight one close to Merriwell, but it was one of Dad's quick in-shoots, and Merry dodged it with the greatest difficulty.

As Frank straightened up, he gave Morse a look that meant volumes. It was a warning, although not a word was spoken.

But Morse was furious, and he drove the second ball straight at Frank, doing it so suddenly that he thought Merry would be taken off his guard.

Again Frank dodged barely in time to get out of the way, and he knew the ball would have severely injured him if it had hit him.

From the grand stand came cries of:

"Shame! shame!"

The bleachers arose and howled their disgust. It was plain enough that Morse was trying his old trick, and the spectators were not at all pleased. If the opposing team had been the bullying Little Rocks it would have seemed all right; but the Yale Combine had acted

like gentlemen, and Fort Worth was disgusted to see a pitcher on their team try to bully the strangers or injure them in a dirty way.

"Take him out, Seekins!" howled a big man with red whiskers. "We didn't come here to see this kind of work!"

"Look here, Morse," said Frank, quietly but sternly, as he faced the pitcher, "if you throw another ball at me, I shall throw this bat at you, and I'll guarantee you will have hard work to dodge it."

"That's right!" shouted the man with the red whiskers; "and if he dodges it, I'll come over and thump him with something he can't dodge."

Sam Seekins saw that Morse was arousing the anger of the spectators and causing them to sympathize with the strangers, which was something he did not want.

He walked in toward Dad a bit, saying:

"Be careful now! Don't hit anybody."

"What if I can't help it?" grinned Morse, in his hateful way.

"Then you had better go out of the box. This is an exhibition game. We are not out for blood."

"I am!" muttered Morse, under his breath.

But Dad saw that it would not do to make any further attempt to hit Frank that time. He resolved to try the trick later, if the opportunity seemed to come just right.

Two balls had been called on him, and so he decided to put one over. He worked the outside corner, and Merriwell, whose nerves did not seem at all shaken by what had happened, rapped a hot one into right field.

Browning had been playing well off from second, and he got a good start, so that it was useless to try to stop him from scoring, while Hodge took third.

Again the enthusiasm of the spectators was aroused, and it seemed as if, all at once, the entire crowd had gone over to the side of the Yale Combine.

"Why, they're right onto Dad!" roared the man with the red whiskers. "He don't seem to scare them chaps!"

Having scored, Browning dragged himself over to the bench, where he dropped down heavily, dismally groaning:

"I wouldn't do anything like that for any other fellow in the world but Frank Merriwell! It's awful!"

Rattleton came to bat next. He was a left-handed batter, and, as Morse was a left-handed pitcher, Harry could not touch the ball. Dad fanned him out with ease.

In the meantime Frank had stolen second, and all that was needed was a good hit to drive in two more scores and give the Yale Combine a fine start.

Harry was disgusted to think he could not make that hit, and he begged Barney to "line her out."

"Oi'll do me bist," said Mulloy, as he advanced to the plate.

But Barney popped up an easy one to short, and still Bart and Frank remained on the bases.

Diamond took his turn at the bat with a do-or-die look in his eyes. Two strikes were called on him, and then he fell on the ball with all the vigor in him.

Away sailed the sphere, and a great shout went up,

for Hodge was racing down to score, and Merriwell was coming in. It looked like a safe hit and good for two bags at least.

Then it was that Lorrimer, Fort Worth's new center fielder, showed the stuff there was in him, for, after a long run, he leaped into the air and pulled the ball down.

Diamond was out, and the inning had ended 1 to 0 in favor of Frank Merriwell's combine.

"Now we'll fall on that fresh young duck and hammer him all over the yard," said Morse, as the Fort Worth team came in to the bench.

"Dat's right," nodded O'Connor. "He'll be easy."

"Don't use him too rough," advised Seekins. "He is young, but he will get over it, if he lives long enough."

But the Fort Worths were destined to meet with the greatest surprise of their lives, for but three men came to the bat, and they fanned out one after another, not one of them being able to connect with the ball for anything more than a foul.

"Well! well! well!" roared the delighted man with the red whiskers. "What has Seekins met up with this time?"

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled Hans, as he trotted in from the field. "Don'd this peen a snaps! Id vas more fun than you efer seen perfore."

"Don't anybody get the idea that we have a snap here," advised Frank. "This has started out for a red-hot game. If we can hold our own a while, we may win; but we have not played together, and there is

danger that we'll go all to pieces the moment one or two bad plays are made."

"Begorra!" exclaimed Barney; "it's meself thot don't see how we're goin' to make any bad plays at all, at all, whin ye're doin' all th' worruk, Frankie."

"But that can't keep up," Merriwell declared. "I'll not strike three men out every inning. The rest of the team will get some work before long."

Ephraim was the first man at bat. He stood up to the plate with his feet too wide apart, looking gangling and awkward, and Morse had a picnic with him, for he seemed to close his eyes and whang away at anything. He did not seem to come within a yard of the ball, and was sent to the bench in a hurry.

Toots was next, and Frank had some hopes of him.

"Crack it out, Toots," advised Frank. "If he uses speed on you, just meet it fairly, and it will go all right."

"I's gwan teh do mah bes', Marser Frank," declared the colored lad. "It's been some time sence I played ball, an' I nebber tried to strike a pitcher dat c'u'd sen' 'em in lek dey wus shot out ob a gun—no, sar!"

It was plain that Toots was uneasy and frightened, and he fell an easy victim. Only once did he swing his bat. Morse pitched four balls, and three of them were strikes, so Toots was sent to join Ephraim on the bench.

Dunnerwust picked out a bat and waddled up to the plate.

"Oh, my!" grinned Morse.

"Shust you wait an hour!" advised Hans, seriously.

"I peen goin' to make you said 'oh, my!' Der umbire petter ged oudt anodder pall, for you'll nefer found dot one after I hit id."

This caused some merriment among the spectators, but there was still greater merriment when Hans slammed at the first ball so hard that the force of the blow yanked him off his feet and landed him on the ground on the back of his neck.

Ephraim ran out and helped the Dutch lad up. Then Hans picked up his bat, and looked it over in sober astonishment.

"I don'd seen der hole," he said, and the crowd laughed again.

"Why, it's a regular circus!" cried somebody. "I'm glad Little Rock stayed away."

Hans refused to use that bat again, but, with another stick, he did not do any better.

"Try another," advised somebody.

"Yaw, I vas goin' to done dot," said Hans, and he changed again.

But with no better success, and he went out quickly, making the third man.

Morse had duplicated Merriwell's trick by striking out the side and retiring it in one, two, three order.

Some of Frank's men were inclined to be despondent as they went into the field, but Merriwell laughed at them and encouraged them.

"It's all right," he declared. "We must keep right after them, that's all. We have the start on them."



## CHAPTER IX.

### A HOME RUN.

A beautiful game it proved to be. The outfield of the Yale Combine was given very little to do, but every man in the infield found hot work, and they responded beautifully.

At short Barney made some wonderful stops and lightning throws, while Harry, on third, without doubt the most difficult position of the infield, took some hot "skimmers" off the ground and sent them across the diamond as if they had been thrown by powder.

Diamond saved Dunnerwust no small amount of work by getting back into right field and capturing two flies that looked difficult for Hans.

Up to the fifth, not an error was made on either side, and not a man save Browning had crossed the plate.

In this inning Fort Worth got a man on first by a hit, sacrificed him to second, and then a fly that was dropped by Toots let the score in, making the game tied, with one of the Fort Worth team on second.

"Here's where we do it, boys!" cried Seekins.

But Frank remained cool as ever, put on more steam, and struck out the next two batters.

Now, indeed, it was a hot game. Fort Worth took a turn at making errors, and but for the fact that the "wrong end" of the batting list came up, Merriwell's team would have secured at least two scores. As it

was, stupid base-running on the part of Hans shut them out without a tally.

From this time on to the ninth it stood 1 and 1, with the spectators expecting every inning that Fort Worth would make a spurt and run in four or five.

Morse was batted harder than usual, which seemed to break him all up. The thought of being batted freely by a team of boys broke his courage, and it was by the greatest kind of outfield work that Fort Worth held the Yale Combine down.

Seekins' men went in in their half of the ninth to win the game, and, with one man out, they filled the bases.

Right there a safe hit would have decided it by bringing in two runs.

Then it was that Frank showed the stuff he was made of, as he struck out the heaviest batter among the professionals, and caused the next man to pop up a little one to Barney, who smothered it with ease.

At this point the excitement was such as had not been known on that field for the season. The visitors were cheered with such wild enthusiasm that the game could not go on for some minutes.

"You've got 'em, youngsters!" roared the red-whiskered man. "That was their last chance! Give it to 'em! If you score now, it fixes the thing!"

"We must keep them from scoring," said Seekins to his men. "Get them over onto an extra inning, and we will do 'em. Hold 'em down, Dad!"

"Oh, to blazes with this kind of business!" retorted Morse, surlily, his grin having vanished from his face.

"Here I am throwing my arm off to beat a lot of kids! I didn't sign for this!"

"If you do not hold them down, you will be the guy of the whole town," said Seekins.

Mulloy was the first man up, and he got a safe hit; but he was desperate, and tried to make it a two-bagger. This was a mistake, for he was caught at second on a close decision.

Frank kicked and the crowd howled, but the umpire was obstinate. Then Merriwell saw the umpire had been given a tip to aid Fort Worth to win if he could do so without making the trick too open.

Diamond came next, and two strikes were called on him when both of them should have been balls. It was useless to kick, and he went after the next one that came anywhere near the plate, popping up a high foul, that fell into the catcher's glove.

Two men were out, and Morse began to grin again and wag his jaws.

Gallup came next, and he had not obtained a hit for the day. Since making the marvelous throw in the first inning, he had done nothing to distinguish himself.

"This is easy," thought Dad, as he sent over a "hummer."

At this point came a surprise. Ephraim struck with all his might, and——

Crack!—he hit it!

"Run!"

A hundred voices roared the word.

Ephraim obeyed. With his long legs working in a

wild and jerky manner, his arms flying about like flails, he pranced down to first.

Rattleton was there as coacher:

"Git!" he screamed, "git along!"

On to second charged Ephraim, while the ball was bounding away out into left field, with two men pursuing it.

As he went over second, Gallup's legs became entangled, and he fell down, sending up a perfect cloud of dust.

He was up in a minute, and, with legs and arms working furiously, eyes bulging, teeth set and hair standing, he tore along to third.

Mulloy was on the coach line there. He saw one of the fielders rising with the ball, but he knew the man would not be able to throw it home.

"C'wan, ye tarrier!" screeched the Irish lad, catching hold of Ephraim's arm and sending him toward the home plate. "Hurro! It's an Oirishmon fer luck ye'd oughter be!"

The fielder sent the ball whistling to short, the shortstop caught it, whirled, sent it shooting home.

O'Connor was waiting for it, and it was plain enough that Gallup stood little show of scoring.

Merriwell saw this, and was on his feet, wishing he could do something to aid the Vermonter in getting home.

The shortstop's throw was high, causing O'Connor to stand erect. Had it been a low throw, Ephraim would not have stood a chance, unless O'Connor had muffed it.

Now there was one chance in a hundred.

"Slide, Ephraim—slide," shouted Frank, and Gallup made a headlong plunge for the plate.

He got there! There was no doubt of it, for O'Connor was unable to get the ball and get down in time to make it so close that the umpire would dare declare it out.

"Safe home!" declared the umpire, regretfully.

Then there was a roar—then the crowd came charging from the bleachers into the diamond and cheered with delight.

And Dad Morse—where was he? When they looked for him he was not to be found. O'Connor had likewise vanished.

Merriwell's men were all heroes, but Frank and Ephraim were regarded as the greatest heroes.

"Sign the whole team, Seekins!" shouted the crowd.

When it was all over, Frank and Ephraim walked from the ground beside Ida Day and Eva Raymond. Two happier girls were not to be found in Fort Worth, and scores of other girls regarded them with open envy.

The report of the game spread like fire, and the whole town heard of it in a short time. Those who had not attended were sorry, and those who left the field were disgusted with themselves.

Wherever the boys went they were regarded with wonder. It did not seem possible that those heedless "kids" had beaten Fort Worth's professionals.

But that the game was "on the level" there could

be no doubt, for the strangers gathered in the gate money.

The following forenoon Sam Seekins came to Frank and Bart and tried to sign them as a battery.

"I'll give you two hundred and fifty a month for the season, and all expenses," he said.

"You could not get us for twice that money," smiled Frank. "It would make us professionals, and that would debar us from amateur games."

"But I must have you!" exclaimed Seekins. "Both Morse and O'Connor have jumped the team and disappeared. I have a message that Little Rock will be on hand this afternoon, and I have no battery that I feel like putting against them."

"I hadn't ought to pitch two games in succession, like that, but I will try it to help you out, and I think Bart will catch me; but that is all the game we can play with your team, and we will not take pay for that. Eh, Bart?"

"Make much arrangements as you like," said Bart. "I am with you."

So it was settled, and that afternoon Frank pitched for Fort Worth against the "slugging" Little Rocks. He gave Little Rock exactly five hits and Fort Worth won "in a walk."

This was the greatest surprise the Southern League received for the season.

The boys were urged to stay and play more games, but Frank declined the offer.

"We must move on," he said. "I have already writ-



ten to a friend of mine at Guthrie, saying I would spend the night with him and I always keep my word."

"Will you play more ball there?" questioned Seekins.

"I hardly think so. We are out for all sorts of sports—not baseball alone."

There the talk ended, and the Combine left Fort Worth early in the morning, a crowd at the depot giving them a rousing cheer as they departed.

## CHAPTER X.

### FRANK MAKES AN ENEMY.

The howl of a dog in pain, accompanied by the sound of blows, came from the big stable at the rear of the Oklahoma Hotel in the town of Guthrie.

Frank Merriwell turned abruptly, stopping in his walk, and looked toward the building. The unmerciful beating of a dog always angered him. In this case there was a possibility that it might be one of his dogs that was receiving this cruel treatment.

Merriwell and his friends had arrived in Guthrie the evening before. As he had told Seekins, he had passed the night at the residence of Judge Willard Joyce, who was an old Yale man, while the others had put up, at the expense of the Guthrie Gun Club, at the Oklahoma Hotel, the best public house in the town.

Judge Joyce was not only an old Yale man and a politician and official of prominence in the territory of his adoption, but he was, likewise, an enthusiastic sportsman, and it was through him a special invitation had been extended to Merriwell and his friends to visit the booming little city of Guthrie, partake of the club's hospitality, and enjoy the sports that the region roundabout afforded.

One of the promised sports was jack-rabbit coursing, and our hero had brought up from Fort Worth two of the fastest greyhounds that money could buy, and had

placed them in this stable, set apart for the housing of the hounds.

He glanced up at the hotel, where his friends were probably breakfasting, for the time was early morning, then walked to the stable door, drew it quickly open, and stepped inside.

A young man of twenty-three or twenty-four was using a dog whip on a fine hound. The dog had backed into a corner and now lay on the floor quivering under the blows so mercilessly rained on it.

It was not Merriwell's hound.

The young man was Sneed Parker. Frank had met him at the hotel the evening before and been introduced to him. He was a physician and a resident of Guthrie.

As the door opened and Frank stepped within, Sneed Parker turned angrily, the whip still uplifted.

But for a certain tallowy whiteness, Parker's face might have been called handsome. Even his anger could scarcely give color to it. He glared at Frank as if he thought the latter's coming a menace, and the words with which he greeted the intrusion almost made Frank believe Parker had been drinking.

"Well, what do you want? If I choose to whip my dog when he disobeys me, you've no call to interfere!"

"Perhaps not," said Merriwell, resolved to maintain his composure in spite of the biting accent that made Parker's words so irritating. "It seems to me, though, that you're rather hard on the dog. He'll not be fit to run if you beat him that way."

The hound whimpered and looked toward him. Its appealing eyes were almost human in their intelligence.

There was in Merriwell's voice and in Merriwell himself what was lacking in Sneed Parker, that true and inner kindness which attracts the attention and love of children and animals. The hound felt it, and, still whimpering like a punished child, it began to crawl out of its corner toward him.

The action rekindled Sneed Parker's fury. He turned to the hound and began to beat it again, while it cringed at his feet and yelped in pain.

"Stop that!" commanded Merriwell, taking a step forward.

Parker faced around, his eyes blazing. His white, tallowy face grew even more ghastly.

"Take that for your interference!" he cried, aiming a blow with his whip at Frank Merriwell's face.

Swish—snap!

The whip cut the air and landed with stinging force, causing Frank to stagger backward, uttering a cry.

But he did not fall, for he had flung up one arm and protected his face from the savage attack.

It almost seemed, however, that the lash of the whip had cut through his sleeve, and Frank was thoroughly aroused.

The next instant he leaped at Parker and tore the whip from his grasp.

"Even up, is my motto," he half laughed.

Then the biting lash whistled through the air once more and descended on Parker's neck, leaving a red welt.

Sneed Parker sprang back with a cry of rage, drew a

revolver from his hip pocket and threw it forward as if to shoot.

But for the third time the lash whistled through the air. It caught the revolver and jerked the weapon from Parker's hand to send it spinning to the other side of the stable.

Before Parker could regain his head and determine what to do, the stable door, which had swung partly to, was again thrust open, and Bart, Harry and Jack pushed in, closely followed by Bruce and Ephraim, while outside were heard the voices of Barney, Hans and Toots. The landlord of the hotel was with them, and all had been drawn to the stable by the pitiful cries of the hound.

"Put down that whip and I will fight you in any way you may name," Sneed Parker declared.

"But I have no desire to fight you," Frank answered.

"Oh, you are afraid to!" sneeringly returned the furious man. "You interfere in what is my business, you take the whip out of my hands, and then you talk that way!"

Frank turned and gave the whip to the landlord.

"You may think as you please about that, Dr. Parker!" he continued. "What you think is a matter of indifference to me. If I interfered it was because you were beating that poor dog to death. Cruelty to animals is considered a crime in most places, and I presume it is not held in high esteem in Oklahoma."

"Right you are!" asserted Rattleton, who always stood ready to back Frank in anything without investi-

gation. "So he's the chap that was heating the bound—I mean beating the hound! It would serve him right to give him a little taste of his own medicine."

A disfiguring sneer curled the thin lips of Sneed Parker.

"I shall have to back down, of course, with a dozen against me. I can't fight all of you, and Mr. Merriwell refuses to fight me alone, therefore, I see nothing else for me to do.

"But," shooting a wicked glance at Frank and laying special stress on the words, "Mr. Merriwell needn't flatter himself that this little affair is ended. I shall do nothing, of course, while he is the guest of the gun club, but I shall expect satisfaction for this insult before he leaves town."

"As you please," said Merriwell. "I won't fight you now, because you are in a passion, and for the further reason that it would not seem fair with these friends at my back. But if you must have satisfaction before I leave Guthrie——"

"Oh, come away and let him alone!" grumbled Diamond. "We didn't come to this town to fight, and we're not going to unless we're jumped on."

Browning was leaning lazily against the side of the door, yawning. He had been hurried from his room while still dressing, called by Gallup, who said Merriwell was having a fight in the stable with a man who was whipping one of the dogs.

He was about to open his mouth to say something, when Barney Mulloy put in an oar and stopped him.

"Begobs, Oi dunno about thot, so Oi don't!"



Frank turned away. He was sorry he had been forced into so violent an antagonism with a citizen of Guthrie and with a member of the gun club at whose invitation he and his friends were there. He wondered if he had acted hastily, but his conscience told him he had not.

"Diamond is right in one thing," he declared. "We didn't come to this town to fight, and I am sorry this thing occurred. Dr. Parker will think better of what he has said after a while, and I am sure he will not want to lose the esteem of the people of Guthrie by cruel treatment of one of his hounds, even though the dog has not been entirely obedient."

Then he stepped from the stable and walked toward the hotel, leaving his friends to follow him at their leisure.

In some way the story of his interference with Dr. Parker got abroad, probably through the landlord, and a few hours later the subject was broached by Judge Joyce, as he and Frank talked together in the judge's cozy sitting-room.

"I don't know that you'll be in any danger from Parker," the judge observed, when Frank had confided to him the correct story, "though I should advise you to keep your eyes open. He is not very well known here, and for one I haven't a very high opinion of him."

"I thought he was an old resident," said Frank.

The judge laughed.

"None of us are old residents. This town—city we

call it—was nothing but pasture land a little while ago. But Sneed Parker is a new resident, even for this place. He came here about two months ago and hung out his shingle. I presume he has some practice, though I really don't know. At any rate, he lives well and dresses well. He was let into the gun club against my judgment and vote, though he is a good shot and something of a sportsman. You may have noticed the pasty look of his skin."

"Yes," answered Frank. "It was one of the first things I noticed."

"Please consider this confidential, but I am sure he is a dope fiend. I think he is an habitual user of morphine, or some such drug, hypodermically. I say hypodermically, for I never saw him take anything in the form of liquid, pill or powder, and I once noticed some scars on his arm, when his sleeve chanced to slip up, that were undoubtedly made by a hypodermic syringe."

"Perhaps that was why he acted as he did—whipped that poor dog so, and then turned on me in such a rage. He may not be entirely responsible for all that he does."

"You may be right," nodded the judge. "There is one thing I do not much like. Dope fiend as he is, he is rather handsome, in spite of his tallowy complexion. He is also something of a dresser and presents a pleasing appearance. Society here—which doesn't require a certified pedigree or the exhibition of a coat of arms—has made him welcome; and the worst of it all is that he seems to have walked into the affections of one

of the sweetest girls we have in this town—Miss Alice Dean, daughter of the cashier of the Traders' Bank."

"So!" said Frank. "That almost makes me wish I had given him another cut with the whip while I had so good an opportunity."

## CHAPTER XI.

### A "JACK RABBIT."

"Will yez git onto the coorves av thot rabbit?" cried Barney Mulloy, with well-affected surprise, as he and the other members of Frank Merriwell's party came out on the hotel piazza, after having done justice to a well-cooked and well-served meal.

Tied to a post near the corner of the piazza was one of those diminutive donkeys that are known to the West as burros, and it was to this that Barney called attention. It was very small, even for a burro, and its gray color and huge ears made it look not unlike a big rabbit.

"Oi've heard a d'ale about the soize av those jock rabbits," Mulloy continued, "but, be me sowl, Oi never dr'amed av seein' wan av thim as big as thot!"

"Shimminy Gristmas!" exclaimed Hans Dunnerwust, with rounding eyes. "Vos dot a rappit peen vor sure? I t'ought I vould know one uf dem rappit shacks ven he seen me. He coult run a minid in a mile, I pelief me, dot veller coult. Yaw!"

Barney gave the other members of the party a suggestive wink. He saw that the burro's hoofs were hidden in the grass, which grew there rather luxuriantly, and he thought it would be fine sport if he could make the Dutch boy believe this was one of the immense jack rabbits of which all had recently talked so much.

"By chaowder, when I left the old farm in Varmount I never expected to see anything like that!" declared Gallup, understanding the significance of the wink. "Looks considerable in color like the gray colt dad used to have. Drug me raound the barn sixteen times once. I was darned fool enough to tie the halter strap to my waist and try to ride it."

"Ride what?" asked Rattleton. "Your waist or the strap?"

Gallup gave him an injured look.

"The gray colt, gol darn ye! Ye know what I meant well enough, by gum!"

"Well, there's no possible danger that can come to any one from one of those rabbits," said Rattleton, addressing the crowd, but speaking for the benefit of the Dutch boy. "They're the most timid things on earth."

"I know dot!" Hans nodded. "I peen hunding some leetle rappits vun dime, unt I gatch him my hants mit unt, py shimminy! he vos most to deat' scat. Dose rappits vos nottings to peen afrait uff me."

"And there is nothing to make you afraid of them," continued Rattleton.

"Dot's vot I say. Notting to make me avrait uff mineselluf."

"I'll bet you anything that you won't dare to go up to that thing and hub its read—I mean rub its head."

"I pet you your life I rups his heat unt liis legs uff I a notion dakes."

"But you won't take the notion!"

"Gol darned if I don't believe that rabbit would kick like a mule," grinned the boy from Vermont.

"You seen him rup me," said Hans, waddling off the piazza and approaching the burro. "Shust eferybody stant pack."

The burro turned its ungainly head, lifted its huge ears and stared at the Dutch boy as he approached, as if wondering what he meant to do.

"See dot!" cried Hans, putting his hands on its head. "I vos scaret uf him alretty. You pet me, dis shack rappit knows he is my masder."

"Better keep away from his heels, b'gosh!" warned Gallup.

"A rappit shack can't gick!" cried Hans. "Nod your life on, he von't. He dot kind uf a boy don't peen, alretty yet."

He passed his hands over the burro's ears and along its neck, then let them slip down its back. The burro turned its head and watched him with curious eyes.

The Dutch boy's hands reached its legs and passed toward its heels.

"Id vos damer as a sick kidden!" he cried, delighted with his success.

But his eyes opened wide as they fell on the burro's wispy tail. Up to that moment he had not noticed its tail.

"Py shimminy, a shack rappit must be different as a——"

He stepped behind the burro and took the tail in his grasp for close inspection.

"Be careful!" cried Frank, starting forward.



Then there was a transformation. The burro's ungainly head went down, its heels came up, and Hans was sent flying through the air. He gave an astonished squeal, and landed with a jolt that jarred the ground.

Fortunately he was not much hurt. He had been so close to the burro that its legs had lifted him, and he had not been touched by its heels.

Hans gave another squeal and clasped his hands to his sides. Then he sat up and stared stupidly around, being somewhat dazed by the effects of the fall.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" he squawked. "Vos dot a bile-drifer dot I hit?"

"Look out, or he will give it to you again," called Rattleton. "That rabbit seems to be as much of a kicker as a star boarder at a summer hotel."

Hans rolled backward out of the way of the twinkling heels, showing an agility that was comical.

"Oxcuse me!" he said, as he crawled to his feet and began to dust his clothing and feel of himself to see that no bones were broken. "Dis rappit don't peen like de little feller dot vos hunding me, vot you dolt me apout avhile ago. Oxcuse me!"

He was beginning to see through the joke.

The burro seemed to see through it, too, for at that moment it opened its huge mouth and gave vent to a "Hee-haw" that almost shook the chairs on the piazza.

"Come," said Merriwell, linking his arm through that of Bart Hodge, "we've had our little fun, which, fortunately, did not result seriously, and now let's take the walk we were talking about. You've hardly had

a look at Guthrie yet. Any of the rest of you like a stroll?"

"No, thank you," yawned Browning. "The shade of this piazza suits me very well. I don't know about to-morrow's coursing, if it stays as hot as this."

"I don't think I care to go," announced Diamond, curling himself into one of the easy-chairs.

The others seemed to feel like Diamond and Browning, and Merriwell and Hodge left them and went for a stroll through the town.

Everywhere they saw jack rabbits. Boys were bringing them in from the country in baskets, dust-covered farmers were unloading them from their wagons. The gun club had advertised for live jack rabbits and were getting them by the score.

"They'll bu'st the jack rabbit market, if they keep this up," remarked Bart Hodge.

"Or the Guthrie Gun Club," said Frank, with a smile.

## CHAPTER XII.

### AN ENCOUNTER AND A CALL.

As Frank Merriwell and Bart Hodge were returning from their stroll and were passing up a narrow street that led in the rear of the Traders' Bank, they saw Sneed Parker coming toward them, accompanied by a pretty girl, whom they felt sure was Alice Dean.

They had been talking of Parker.

"Speak of the devil and you will see one of his imps," said Hodge.

"And speak of angels and you'll hear the flutter of wings," observed Merriwell.

"Yes, she is pretty," Hodge declared. Then, as she came nearer, he added:

"As pretty as a picture, by Jove! It makes me want to punch the head of that fellow, to see him walking with so handsome a girl, just as if he had a right."

Across the street, on a vacant lot, two Cheyenne half-breeds, known respectively as Indian Joe and Jimmy Crookleg, were camped. The half-breeds had been in Guthrie two or three weeks, living on this lot in a prairie schooner that had a distressingly dirty canvas covering. They were horse traders, having several fine animals picketed on the lot. Besides this, they made headdresses and rude bows and arrows, which they sold to whoever would buy.

As Sneed Parker and the girl drew near, Indian

Joe, the larger and more repulsive of the half-breeds, reeled across the street. It was plain he had been "hoisting in" the white man's firewater pretty freely, and was ready for any sort of mischief.

Bart Hodge caught Merriwell by the arm.

"That rascal has got a demon in his eye," he said. "If he speaks to that girl, I hope Sneed Parker will knock him down."

"So do I," responded Frank. "But I don't believe the half-breed will dare to speak to her."

"He won't?" growled Hodge. "Just look at that!"

As the girl drew near the half-breed, looking at him askance and fearfully, he moved toward her, with his arms outspread as if he meant to take her in his embrace. He was not a dozen feet from Merriwell and Hodge at the time.

Instead of doing as Merriwell and Hodge hoped, Sneed Parker seemed to be afraid of Indian Joe. He drew back, pulling at the girl's arm.

The girl screamed in fright.

Parker's action was so unexpected and altogether pusillanimous that Merriwell and Hodge were amazed.

"This way," they heard Parker say. "We'll avoid him by going into the bank through the back entrance."

Parker was evidently perplexed and angered. Frank Merriwell was perplexed and indignant. He did not believe Parker was a coward, and he could not understand his present course.

"That fellow has a good reason for being afraid of the half-breed," was Merriwell's thought. "I wonder if there can be anything between them?"

The girl stood still, thoroughly frightened, and Parker then pushed forward, still holding her by the arm, and began to speak to the half-breed as if he would argue with him.

"Stand back!" roared Indian Joe, in thickened tones.

The accent was something of a revelation to Frank. He had dickered with Indian Joe that forenoon for a quilled war-bonnet, and Joe had pretended not to be able to speak much English.

The girl released herself from Parker's grasp and ran toward Merriwell and Hodge, as if by some instinct she divined that they would protect her at the risk of their lives if need be.

Without an instant's hesitation Frank stepped in between her and Indian Joe.

"Stand back!" Indian Joe roared again.

But he halted irresolutely when he saw Merriwell's firm stand, though he glowered and clinched his fists.

"Walk up—walk up and I'll take pleasure in knocking you down," said Frank, laughing so lightly that Indian Joe was not sure whether the words were spoken in sober earnest or not.

He found out before he was a minute older.

He sought to shoulder Merriwell aside and reach the girl. Then Merriwell's fist shot out with lightning-like quickness.

Whack—the blow fell with stunning force on the half-breed's jaw. It seemed fairly to lift him into the air. He spun half around, sought to recover himself, then struck the ground with a mighty jolt.

At the same instant Merriwell heard Hodge cry:

"Take that, you red scoundrel!"

Bart, who was standing ready to assist Frank if his aid was needed, had been attacked from the rear by Jimmy Crookleg, Indian Joe's partner.

Hodge's blow was not very effective, for Jimmy Crookleg danced backward to get out of the way as it fell. Now Merriwell saw Crookleg make a dash at Bart with a knife.

"Look out!" Frank warned.

Hodge deftly avoided Crookleg's rush, then struck the half-breed's knife arm so violently that the bone almost snapped and the knife went spinning halfway across the street. Crookleg roared with rage and pain as his arm dropped helplessly at his side.

Indian Joe was trying to get on his feet. Merriwell saw the effort, but turned about, nevertheless, to speak a reassuring word to the girl.

To his surprise he saw Sneed Parker leading her tremblingly to the doorway which led into the bank from this street. Her cheeks were as white as ashes, Merriwell noticed, when she reached the doorway and turned toward him. She tried to smile her thanks. Then Parker drew her into the corridor and shut the door with a bang.

Merriwell turned to Indian Joe.

The half-breed had staggered to his feet and stood sullenly glaring at Merriwell. The blow and the fall had somewhat sobered him and taken out of him all desire to fight. But the deep hate revealed in his glittering black eyes was an unpleasant thing to contemplate.



"By the way you are staring at me I don't doubt you'll know me when you see me again," said Merriwell, lightly. "I give you fair warning, though, that if I ever catch you trying any of your tricks on me you will drop a great deal harder than you did this time."

Two or three men came rushing up the street as if in anticipation of a fight. The entire affair had really occupied only a few seconds of time.

"What's the matter?" one of the men panted, as he drew near.

"This fellow has been drinking and was inclined to be ugly," responded Merriwell.

Jimmy Crookleg had recovered his knife and was retreating across the street.

"He attacked you, did he?" the man asked.

"No, he didn't attack me exactly. I didn't give him a chance."

"Then there wasn't any fight. I thought there must have been a fight."

Others were arriving. Merriwell had no desire to go before the police court of Guthrie as a witness against the half-breeds, and he turned to Hodge.

"I guess they won't trouble us any further, eh, Bart?"

"I think not," said Hodge, looking at Crookleg.

"Then we'd better be going."

Arm in arm, they walked away from the gathering crowd, beginning to talk of Sneed Parker and the girl as soon as they felt safe to do so.

"I don't understand it," declared Merriwell. "That was dastardly conduct."

"And such a stunningly handsome girl, too," said Hodge.

Merriwell smiled and gave his friend a sidelong glance.

"Yes, she is pretty."

"Pretty!" exclaimed Hodge. "She is one of the handsomest girls I ever saw."

A few hours later, when a note came from Alice Dean, thanking Merriwell and his friend for their brave conduct and inviting them to call on her at her father's residence, it seemed to Merriwell too bad that Bart Hodge should be out of town.

Bart, at the special invitation of another Yale man, who had settled in Guthrie, had driven out into the country in the cool of the late afternoon and was not expected back for several hours.

"I will make the call for both of us," thought Merriwell, as he left the hotel and bent his steps toward the house pointed out to him as the residence of the bank cashier, Silas Dean, "but I wish Bart were here to go with me. He is rather taken with the girl and he would enjoy it. She is confoundedly pretty!"

Merriwell found Alice Dean a girl without affectation. She greeted him warmly, but not gushingly, and thanked him in a way that made him feel almost like a hero. But she said nothing about Dr. Sneed Parker, which Merriwell thought rather singular, to say the least.

"I am very sorry your friend was not able to come with you," she declared, and Merriwell could see that she meant it. "I hope I shall meet him before your

party leaves. No doubt I shall, too, for I expect to take part in the sports of the gun club."

"Do you shoot?" Merriwell asked, in surprise.

"Oh, yes; and ride, too. I am an honorary member of the gun club, you know. Father is a member."

Merriwell wished more than ever that Bart Hodge was with him.

"I shall be very glad to introduce you to Mr. Hodge," he asserted. "He is a pretty nice fellow, and I am sure he will be pleased to meet you. It's too bad he went out of town."

He was thinking more and more what a handsome girl Alice Dean was. She had blue eyes and brown hair and plump, rosy cheeks, and was dressed most becomingly in some dark material whose somberness was relieved by knots of blue ribbon.

While they talked the minutes sped by as if shod with wings, and when Frank looked at his watch, thinking perhaps it was time to go, he was astonished to see how late it was.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE DEED OF A RASCAL.

About an hour before dawn a stealthy figure stole up to the door of the stable where the greyhounds were kept. It was Dr. Sneed Parker.

"I'll make that fellow Merriwell wish he had let me alone, before he gets out of this town," he hissed, as he passed his hand softly over the door.

"Locked!" he muttered, in a tone of disappointment.

Then he started and peered suspiciously about in the darkness.

"I suppose it is the proper thing for them to lock the door of a place where valuable hounds are kept," he mused, "but I hardly thought they'd do it. I hope the stable isn't watched. I shouldn't want the fellow to catch me in here. My neck burns yet from the cut of the whip. Ha! what was that?"

He drew back, crowding close against the door.

In another moment he was ready to laugh at the cause of his alarm, for it was only a cat stealing through the gloom with velvety feet.

"I'll try the back way," was his thought.

Moving softly around to the back of the stable, Sneed Parker found a window which he was able to slide, and with some difficulty he squeezed through the opening.

"Down!" he whispered, as some of the dogs began to move and whine, "down with you!"

"Merriwell's hounds were in the farther end," he reflected, "and I suppose they are there still."

When he reached the point he drew a match and scratched it softly on his leg. It spluttered and leaped into a blaze, and by the light he saw Merriwell's dogs in the corner in close proximity with some others. They were handsome animals, with long legs, deep chests and noses like spear points. One was black and the other grayish, and they were nearly of a size.

Parker dropped the flaming match and extinguished it with his foot, then stood still for a minute or more, listening carefully, to be sure that the light had not attracted attention.

"I reckon I'd have to set the stable on fire to waken those fellows," he thought, with an ear still cocked toward the hotel.

The hounds were moving uneasily and whimpering all about him. His own dogs had slunk back at sight of him as if they feared a beating, and a general feeling of fear and uneasiness pervaded the stable.

Satisfied that no human eye was on him and that no human ear had heard him, Sneed Parker pulled a piece of needle from the lapel of his coat. It was half of a needle—the sharpened point.

With this in his right hand he stepped quickly into the corner, ran his left hand down over the trembling body of one of the hounds, and with a quick jab inserted the piece of steel deep into the fleshy part of the hound's thigh.

The dog jumped and gave a yelp of pain.

"Down!" Parker whispered, "down, sir!"

A quiver of excitement ran through the stable. The hounds whined louder and moved more uneasily.

"Down!" he again commanded—"down, I tell you!"

He drew from the lapel the pointed half of another needle, dropped his hand to the other dog in the corner, ran his fingers softly over its legs, and jabbed the steel into the thigh with a quick movement, just as he had done before.

The hound yelped.

"Stop that!" he whispered.

Then he stood erect beside the half-crying hounds and listened again.

"The thing is done," he thought, with a revengeful thrill. "If Frank Merriwell wins any points with his hounds to-day it will be a miracle."

The excitement among the dogs was increasing. Those nearest the door were lunging against it, as if trying to get out.

A footstep sounded outside and a thrill of fear went through Parker. This was followed by the swinging open of the door and the flash of a lantern.

Parker retreated against the wall and stood glaring at the lantern and the dimly-seen form behind it. His heart thumped like a trip hammer.

"Pshaw!" he muttered. "Why should I be afraid? My dogs are in here, and I have as much right to enter the stable as that fellow, if I want to."

But he crowded closer against the wall and his uneasiness increased when he saw the lantern and the



man coming toward him. He could not see the man's face.

Parker's right hand stole softly to the pocket in which he habitually carried a revolver.

"If he corners me," he grated, through his set teeth, "I'll make it interesting for him."

Nearer and nearer came the light of the lantern, throwing its circle of rays out in front like a fan, while Sneed Parker, with set teeth and glaring eyes, waited with hand on his revolver.

The dogs were whinng anxiously, and some of them were leaping against the man's legs as if they recognized him as a friend.

"By Jove! it's Merriwell!" thought Parker, with a thrill of fear.

Then the man spoke and the blood retreated from Parker's heart in a great surge.

It was not Merriwell, but the keeper of the stable.

"What's the matter?" he asked, speaking to the dogs. "I thought I heard you yelping. Not fighting, I hope? Keep your paws off me, Victor. There, keep down, won't you?"

Parker still stood in the darkness, with blazing eyes and his hand on his weapon. He was relieved to know that the man was not Merriwell, but the thought of discovery was still a terror to him.

The light of the lantern drew nearer and yet nearer. It fell on his feet. He was sure that in another moment he would be discovered, and was nerving himself for whatever should come.

But the man turned aside, and passed to the other end of the stable, still talking to the dogs.

Parker was shaking like a leaf.

"Heavens!" he sighed. "I was ready for something desperate just then. It's a good thing he didn't come any closer. Now, if he doesn't discover that window, which I was fool enough to leave open, and will go on and out about his business!"

It seemed for a minute that the man would certainly see the open window, but he did not, and finally left the stable, closing the door after him and locking it.

Not until he was outside and his footsteps had died away did Sneed Parker venture to breathe freely.

"Now I must get out of this as quickly as I can," he muttered. "I wouldn't be caught in here at this time of night for a fortune."

Then he walked tremblingly to the window, crawled softly through it, and, after fastening it as he had found it, slipped away as stealthily as he had come.

When, after daybreak, the dogs were brought out of the stable for the races of the day, there was nothing to show that they had been tampered with. The deed had been done so recently that little if any inflammation had taken place. A number of the hounds that had been brought by rail from a distance were somewhat stiff, and the fact that Merriwell's were in the same condition excited no suspicion of foul play. The insertion of the needle points had not drawn blood or left any marks.

Frank was proud of his hounds. They were such fine-looking, intelligent creatures. They leaped and

frisked about him and his friends, and were apparently as fond of him as if he had owned them from their puppyhood.

The members and honorary members of the Guthrie Gun Club were gathered in the street in front of the Oklahoma Hotel. Miss Alice Dean was there, mounted on a spirited horse. She seemed to have recovered entirely from the fright of the previous day. Her cheeks were flushed with health and her eyes were bright and laughing. She wore a riding habit with a short skirt, which wonderfully became her.

"Permit me to introduce you to my friend, Mr. Bartley Hodge," said Merriwell, at the first opportunity. "Mr. Hodge, Miss Dean."

All were mounted. As he lifted his hat to acknowledge the introduction, Bart's horse shied and came near throwing him. He bit his lips in vexation.

"I am very happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Hodge," Alice Dean declared, as soon as Bart was able to rein in his horse, "and to thank you for coming so promptly to my defense yesterday. I regretted that you were not able to accept my invitation of last evening."

"I was unfortunately out of town," said Hodge, inwardly raging and with a very red face.

"Yes, Mr. Merriwell so informed me. We will likely have a nice day for the coursing. I hope you and your friends may enjoy it. It is something new to all of you, I believe. I understood Mr. Merriwell to say so."

"Yes," answered Hodge. "Entirely new. I don't doubt we shall enjoy it very much."

He knew his face was as red as a beet and he was glad when his horse shied again and brought the talk to an abrupt close.

"Mr. Merriwell!" he grunted to himself. "It's Mr. Merriwell and Mr. Merriwell every other sentence!"

Bart was vexed and annoyed more than he would have cared to confess. He had been in one of his sulken moods all the morning. Nothing had seemed to go just right with him. He had not liked his bed nor his breakfast, and now he was fuming against Merriwell and against his horse.

The truth is that Bart was jealous. Merriwell appeared to be standing entirely too well in the estimation of Alice Dean.

"Nobody has any show when Merry is around," he grumbled. "He is just naturally the luckiest dog alive. It fell on him to take the most prominent part in defending her yesterday, and luck kept him at the hotel and took me away when that invitation came, and now I'm on a horse that's bound to make a fool of me at every opportunity. I wish we had never heard of the Guthrie Gun Club."

Every one else seemed to be having a good time, however. The hounds were leaping and running. There was laughter and banter and jest. Rattleton and Browning, Toots and Gallup, Dunnerwust and Barney Mulloy, and all the others were in high feather. Hodge only was discontented and petulant.

The jack rabbits were in boxes in light wagons, and before the sun was an hour high, the Guthrie Gun Club and its guests, with others who desired to witness the sport, were off for the point selected for the coursing.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### JACK RABBIT COURSING.

At the start Merriwell permitted his hounds to run and frolic as much as they liked, thinking the exercise would only limber them up and put them in trim for the work before them. But when one of them, and the one he considered the finer, began to show signs of lameness, he called them in and kept them well at heel.

There was one thing that surprised Merriwell, while it pleased him. Sneed Parker, though he was one of the party, did not venture to speak to Alice Dean. Nor did he ride at her side, as Merriwell had anticipated.

"They are at outs," was his conclusion. "She has cut him for his conduct of yesterday. That's good. If our coming here separates those two it will be one of the best things that ever happened."

He spoke of it to Bart Hodge.

"I've noticed that," said Hodge, in a tone that made Frank gave him a close look. "It will give you a better show, Merry."

The place selected for the coursing was well adapted to the purpose. It was a level stretch of country, covered with short grass, and without gully or ravine, save on the south, where there was unbroken land and some hills.



"See how eager for work the hounds are," exclaimed Merriwell.

"Makes me glad I'm not a hound," grunted Bruce Browning, wiping his heated face. "I'd hate to have to run in such weather as this."

"Not if you were a hound," said Rattleton.

"Yah, yah!" laughed Toots. "If Mistah Browning war a hound dawg he'd mek a mighty po' show. He couldn't run no mo'n a mud turkle."

The coursing was to be for points. Hence it was not always the fastest dog that was considered the best. The dog that got over the ground with the greatest ease and grace, that turned quickest, that leaped clean and true, might outrival a dog that, on a straightaway heat, could beat it out of sight.

A big jack rabbit, with long, limber legs, was taken out of a box and placed on the ground some distance in front of the dogs that were to chase it. Not all of the dogs were allowed to run at the same time. Two or three, and sometimes more, were chosen, for the jack is great at dodging, and will often get away from a hound by reason of its ability in that line.

The other dogs were held in leash. All the riders who desired to follow the hounds were in their saddles, ready for the fun.

The jack rabbit crouched for a moment in the grass. Then, discovering that it was really at liberty, it hopped away, going slowly at first.

Frank Merriwell looked about him. Alice Dean was sitting erect in her saddle, with rein held lightly,

her bright eyes fixed on the rabbit. Near her were her father and some lady friends.

"There they go!" shouted Rattleton.

The hounds, two of them, put in for this first race, were off after the rabbit.

The jack heard them coming, lifted himself for a moment on his long hind legs, observed the dogs coming and the horsemen breaking into a canter, then got down to the work that was cut out for him. He seemed to understand that a greyhound runs by sight and not by scent, and that his best course was to strike for the broken country southward.

In another minute he was a gray streak flashing over the short grass with the hounds racing after him in a way to call forth cheers from the veteran sportsmen of the gun club.

"It's a pretty sight," cried Merriwell. "Just look at those hounds, will you!"

Even Browning was stirred into enthusiasm, and swung his hat as he set his horse into motion.

The hounds were running swiftly and easily. They did not really seem to be going as fast as they were. With their noses thrust straight out before them and their long legs in motion, their bodies seemed to open and shut like jackknives.

The rabbit developed a phenomenal burst of speed. His leaps, made with lightning-like quickness, were something tremendous. He drew away from the dogs at first, and it seemed he would be able to reach the broken land without difficulty. The clattering of the

hoofs of the running horses and the cries of the sportsmen gave wings to his feet.

But the lean, reddish-colored hound, that from the first had shown itself a good runner, began to gain on the rabbit, creeping up inch by inch and foot by foot.

The cheers grew louder and wilder, and the horses were spurred into swifter pursuit.

"Land ob wartermillions!" roared Toots, clinging to the saddle-horn with both hands, while his bridle rein swung free, "dis yeh spo't beats foxhuntin' clean out ob sight."

As he said it, the rein slipped farther down, and was caught by one of the horse's forefeet.

Snap!—it was broken instantly.

The horse was jerked quickly around, and Toots, losing his grip of the saddle-horn, went over its ears, plowing up a yard or two of grass and earth with his hard head as he landed.

Merriwell saw the mishap and reined in, but Toots was already scrambling up and needed no assistance.

When he looked again Merriwell saw that the rabbit had dodged and was once more drawing away from the hounds.

A minute later it gained the broken country, where it was comparatively safe, and the dogs were called off.

Toots' horse was caught for him by a member of the club, and the entire party, laughing and joking, took its way back to the starting point, where other hounds and other rabbits were awaiting them.

"By thutter, I kiner thought yeou'd got a ticket plum through to the South Pole when I saw yeou sailin'

through the air that way," grinned the boy from Vermont, when Toots was again in the saddle and ready for the fray. "I did, by chaowder! Next time I'd advise ye to take holt with yeour teeth."

"I thought he was going to cave in the coursing ground and spoil all the sport," laughed Rattleton. "I say, fellows, why is that rabbit like the Guthrie Gun Club?"

"Because it's a hummer," laughed Frank.

"Because it is a product of the country," guessed Browning.

"Both wrong."

"Give it up, then," said Merriwell.

"Because it's out of sight!"

"Thank you for the compliment!" chimed in Alice Dean, with one of her prettiest smiles. "Really, Mr. Rattleton, you ought to join our literary club and become a writer of jokes."

One of Merriwell's hounds was to be pitted against a hound belonging to a gentlemen from El Reno, Frank noticed that the dog limped as it came up, and he began to fear it would not be the runner he hoped. It was the one he thought the faster of the two he had bought.

The rabbit and the dogs started off in good shape, but before Merriwell's dog had run two hundred yards its lameness was seen to increase. At the end of half a mile it dropped back till every one could see it had not the ghost of a show to gain a single point.

"I don't understand that," Frank declared, speaking to Diamond, as they rode side by side. "You will

remember that dog was recommended to me as being the fastest dog in the State of Texas, and by a man I know to be reliable. He has hurt himself some way."

"I noticed a small lump on the side of his right thigh," answered Diamond, "but I didn't think to speak of it. Perhaps he ran into that barbed wire fence along the road as we came out. Plainly he is not in condition."

The other hound crowded the jack rabbit so closely that the latter would have had no show at all if Merriwell's hound had been close enough to checkmate it in its dodging. As it was, the rabbit ran and dodged so cleverly, that, like the first, it gained the broken country and escaped.

When they were again at the starting point, Merriwell got down, and, with Diamond, examined the hound's thigh.

Dr. Sneed Parker sat on his horse a few yards away and watched them uneasily.

As Diamond said, there was a bunch on the dog's thigh. The hair was slightly wet, showing a puncture, and when Merriwell pressed on the bunch with his fingers a small quantity of bloody fluid oozed out.

Frank drew his hand away and something clung to it. He looked at it closely. It was the broken half of a needle.

Diamond glanced at him significantly and whispered:

"That didn't happen by accident, Merry. Do you know what I think?"

"I might guess."

"That was the work of Sneed Parker."

"Then the other hound may be in the same condition," said Frank.

"Perhaps. Call him and we will see."

Another rabbit was being taken from one of the boxes. Merriwell whistled to the dog, and it limped as it came toward him.

"We are done up," he groaned. "My dogs won't be able to win a single point."

Merriwell examined the hound carefully.

"I don't see anything," he said. "Its legs and thighs seem to be all right. What made it limp?"

Diamond lifted one of its hind feet and pulled something from between the toes.

"Just a burr," he declared. "The dog is all right. I don't believe he will limp any more, and we've still got a fighting chance. I know something about hounds, and I tell you this fellow can run. I would be willing to bet money on him."

Sneed Parker rode past at that moment for the apparent purpose of getting into line with the other horsemen. He caught a little of what Diamond said and saw the burr in Diamond's hands.

His tallowy face grew ghastly white.

"Heavens!" he muttered. "Did I get hold of the wrong dog last night? It begins to look that way."

That was just what Dr. Sneed Parker had done. In the darkness he had stabbed one of the needle points into the thigh of one of the other dogs huddled in the corner at the side of Merriwell's, and it began to seem



that he might gain nothing after all for the great risk he had run.

Merriwell's hound and the hound from El Reno were put in place, and the rabbit was released.

It leaped straightaway, taking to the open country, and then circling back toward the hills.

The hounds sprang in pursuit, and the horsemen followed, riding hard on the heels of the dogs.

It was a run to thrill the blood and set every nerve a-tingle. The jack rabbit was very fast, and the dogs the speediest of their kind. The jack was clever, too, and dodged in a way to call forth cries of admiration.

More than once the hounds seemed to be right on top of the rabbit, when, with a leap sidewise, he would dodge and gain at least fifty yards before the dogs could recover from their momentum and again hurl themselves in swift pursuit.

"See that dog slide!" cried Rattleton. "You would think he was sliding for the home plate. Good boy! Get your feet under you and go it again."

Merriwell's hound was proving itself a speedy and graceful runner, quick at stopping and turning, and it exhibited at times an intelligence that seemed almost human. Rattleton's exclamations were called forth by a sliding turn, as the jack rabbit dodged and shot away at right angles.

The race was soon over. Merriwell's dog reached the rabbit first, being a dozen yards in the lead, and was proclaimed the winner.

"Eight points out of a possible ten," announced the judges.

Then Merriwell and his followers swung their caps and gave the slogan of Old Yale.

One of the Guthrie dogs was soon seen to be dead lame, with a swollen bunch on one of its thighs, from which, when examined, there oozed a bloody fluid, though no telltale piece of steel came out, as in the case of Merriwell's dog.

"Pity is isn't one of Parker's own dogs," said Diamond, speaking again to Frank.

"But it may not have been his work," Merriwell answered.

"There's not a doubt of it in my mind, Merriwell. He has been watching you and glaring at you all the morning. I've taken particular notice of his actions. And what's the matter with Hodge? He hangs off as if he had no earthly interest in the coursing."

"Perhaps he hasn't," Frank returned, not choosing to make his answer more definite.

There were other runs, and when Merriwell's hound was rested, it was placed against Parker's best dog, in a race after the fleetest rabbit that had yet come out of the boxes.

"He's going to win again," said Diamond, who once more rode at Merriwell's side. "See him go! If that other dog wasn't lame you could sweep the field."

The rabbit raced and dodged and doubled, but it could not get away from Merriwell's dog. Parker's hound, of whose speed and many qualities its owner had openly boasted, was not in it with Merriwell's. It was outdistanced and outgeneraled in every way.

"Mr. Frank Merriwell's dog, nine points in a possible ten," announced the judges. "Dr. Sneed Parker's dog, six points in a possible ten."

Merriwell glanced at Parker and saw his tallowy face fairly writhing with baffled rage and hate

## CHAPTER XV.

### HODGE GETS HIS EYES OPEN.

When the dogs had been given a thorough trial, and the judges had determined the points to which they were entitled, a general race was announced to be participated in by all the dogs and all the remaining rabbits.

Merriwell's hound had taken the highest number of points, nine in a possible ten, for speed, grace, beauty of action, quickness and cleverness at dodging and turning, display of intelligence, endurance and all the other qualities that go to make the model greyhound.

"I really hope your dog will win in this," said Alice Dean, speaking to Merriwell, Rattleton and Bart Hodge, as they all stood dismounted at the heads of their horses. "He is a dog worth possessing."

"Should you like to own him?" Merriwell asked, quickly. "If so, the members of our party—for he belongs to all of us—will be glad, I am sure, to give him to you as a present when we leave Guthrie. He will be of no possible use to us back East, and with you I am certain he will be in good hands."

"Do you mean it?" she asked, while a pleased flush stole into her face.

"Certainly, or I should not make the offer."

She patted the dog's head.

"There is nothing I should prize more highly, I as-

sure you," she declared. "It would be something by which I could remember your party."

"Then the dog is yours," announced Frank.

"When you leave Guthrie!"

"When we leave Guthrie."

"There are thirteen rabbits remaining," said one of the judges, approaching the group. "We will release them all at once. They will scatter, very likely, and when they have a good start we will unleash the dogs."

"An unlucky number," smiled Alice Dean.

"Perhaps we can scare up a rabbit or two on the prairie, and break the spell," laughed Rattleton.

The hounds were given water again, the last they were likely to get until they reached Guthrie, and while they and the rabbits were being got in readiness for what would probably prove the most exciting run of all, there was a general mounting of horses, amid much laughter and conversational pleasantries.

"There they go!" cried Rattleton, as the released rabbits began to hop across the grass, some in one direction and some in another.

"And there go the hounds!" said Merriwell. "Now for some fun."

"And here we go," groaned Browning. "Now for some jolting and misery. If I'm not dead of sunstroke before we get back to the Oklahoma Hotel it will be a wonder."

Rabbits, hounds and riders were off for a merry race across the plain, each one heading according to his own sweet will.

Some of the rabbits ran toward the sandhills, others

shot straight out into the open country, others swung around in a wide circle.

It was a funny sight to see a big jack rabbit stop and teeter aloft on his long hind legs, looking for the hounds he felt sure were after him. If none was near he hopped on for another dozen yards, only to stop and lift himself again and take a grave survey of his surroundings.

"Now see that old fellow get a move on him," said Diamond, pointing with his riding whip to a big, white-tailed jack that had been hopping along in this leisurely manner. "He will become a streak of greased chain-lightning in another second."

Merriwell's hound was approaching the rabbit, with those quick, easy leaps that are so deceptive, and was close upon the jack before it felt its danger.

Then, realizing all at once that if it escaped it must do the tallest running of its life, it shot away with a mighty bound, and went down the open plain with the speed of the wind.

They were off down the open plain after hound and rabbit, Merriwell, Diamond and Rattleton riding close together, their tongues, and the thud of hoofs on the grass making all the noise, for the swiftly speeding hound gave out no more sound than the rabbit it was chasing.

Bart Hodge followed a hound in pursuit of a gray streak that was shooting toward the sandhills. He was alone at the outset, but when the first rise was passed, he saw another rabbit and another hound, ridden hard after by Alice Dean.



Bart's face flushed, but his sensations were not wholly those of pleasure.

"She doesn't see me," was his thought. "She has no eyes for anything but the hound and the rabbit. I never saw a girl that could sit a horse more gracefully. A born horsewoman, and as pretty as a picture."

He quite forgot the hound he was following, and involuntarily drew rein as he watched her, as if he desired her to come up with him that they might ride on together.

Then he recollected himself and urged his horse anew, still glancing at the girl more than at the hound or rabbit, or the course he was taking.

The line of her pursuit veered more and more, as the rabbit swung around the rim of the hill, and a few minutes later Hodge found himself racing through the bunch grass in the same direction as she, with not more than a hundred yards separating them.

She looked in his direction and gave him a smile and a bow of recognition, whereupon he smiled back and lifted his cap.

The rabbits had come together, and were leaping on side by side, with the hounds in close pursuit, each after his respective rabbit.

To his surprise Hodge saw Alice Dean draw her horse nearer to him.

The distance separating them quickly lessened.

"A pretty race, Mr. Hodge!" she called. "Your dog is running well."

Bart could not resist her kindly good will and geniality. The sullen look went out of his face.

"Thank you," he said. "In my opinion, we haven't had a prettier race to-day."

The rabbits made another turn and went down a grassy slop, with the hounds crowding them hard. The intelligent horses followed, almost of their own accord.

At the bottom of the slope the horse ridden by Alice Dean put one of its forefeet into a badger hole and fell heavily, throwing her with violence from the saddle.

It happened so suddenly and unexpectedly that Hodge was fairly dazed. He sawed fiercely on the rein to bring his horse to a stop, then leaped down and ran back to where the girl lay in a heap, chilled by the fear that she was seriously injured or killed.

Her horse staggered to its feet, trembling violently, but Bart saw that its leg was not broken, and he hoped it was not much hurt.

He gave no further heed to the horse, but knelt at the girl's side and lifted her head.

The pallor of her face increased his fears.

But when he lifted her head still higher, he saw the color come into her cheeks, and he gave a great sigh of relief. When her eyelids fluttered and she moved uneasily, he could have shouted for joy.

The blue eyes opened and stared up at him.

"You don't know how you scared me," he declared, still supporting her head. "That was a terrible fall, and you looked so white! Do you think you are much hurt? If I only knew where to get some water!"

His words brought back her reeling senses.

"I—I—don't know!" she gasped. "My horse stumbled, and I——"

"You got a very bad fall. Do you think you can stand? Permit me to help you."

He took her by the shoulders to assist her, but she sank back, white and weak.

"I will be better in a moment, Mr. Hodge!" she said. "My—my horse! Is he——"

"I think he is all right," assured Hodge.

"And the dogs and rabbits?"

She tried to smile as she asked the question.

"They may be out of the Territory now, by the way they were going. Shall I assist you again?"

She succeeded in gaining her feet this time, and with Hodge's aid managed to reach her horse.

"Poor old fellow," she said, smoothing the horse's neck with her gloved hand. "Did you get a bad fall? Do you think you can carry me back to Guthrie?"

"Do you think you can ride?" Hodge queried.

"I shall be all right in a little while," was her brave assertion. "I am a little shaky and weak, but that will pass away soon. Now, if you will put up the rein and help me into the saddle."

This Hodge did, and was rewarded with a smile that set his heart to hammering.

"The dogs will return soon," she predicted, when Hodge had caught his horse and was again at her side. "Shall we ride toward the starting point?"

Bart Hodge's heart was in a flutter, as they turned the heads of the horses up the slope; and that ride with Alice Dean back to the place where the wagons were stationed, he afterward remembered as one of the pleasantest incidents of his life.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### OUT AFTER COYOTES.

"Hodge has brightened up since yesterday," observed Jack Diamond, speaking to Frank Merriwell. "Hear him laughing over there. He's talking to Alice Dean."

"Well, I don't know but he has a right to feel good," said Merriwell. "He has been smiled on by Miss Dean, and praised by her father, the bank cashier, in a way to make anybody feel good. Half the people in Guthrie know that he was able to render her much-needed assistance when her horse went down yesterday with its foot in a badger hole."

"It is making Sneed Parker look mighty black. From the appearance of his face one would judge that he would like to bite Bart's head off."

The Guthrie Gun Club and its guests were riding and wheeling away from Guthrie in the early afternoon. The greyhounds were not with them. They were accompanied, though, by some half a dozen dogs, that seemed to be better adapted to fighting than to running. The event of the day was to be a coyote drive or roundup.

Frank and his companions rode their bicycles, which had come on by express from Fort Worth. Alice Dean and Sneed Parker were also on wheels, as were some others, but many more were mounted on horses, while

not a few were in buckboards and light spring wagons. The dogs were carried in the wagons to save their strength.

Alice Dean had recovered entirely from the shock of her fall. Merriwell noticed that she avoided Parker and never spoke to him even when they were brought fairly face to face. To all outward appearance Bart had supplanted Parker, and Frank smiled.

The persons taking part in a coyote drive take stations in a circle that is several miles in circumference and begin at the same time to move toward a common center, driving everything in the way of game before them. However, no attention is paid to rabbits, big or little. The object is to start all the coyotes that may chance to be within the circle and drive them to the center, where with dogs and clubs they are dispatched.

Frank wheeled out to a point near the center of the northern limit. On the way he was joined by Bart Hodge, and for more than a mile they rode side by side.

"I want to beg your pardon, Merry," said Hodge, finally. "I made a fool of myself, as I usually do."

"How was that?" Frank questioned.

"I ought to kick myself for forgetting that you are the best friend I ever had, or am likely to have. Miss Dean has told me how you have been praising me to her, and I, like a jealous fool, was all the time thinking the meanest things about you. I hope you won't lay it up against me, Merry, and next time I'll try to be a little more sensible."



"That's all right, Bart," Frank returned. "I had no intention of laying anything up against you. I saw how you felt."

"Well, she is such an attractive girl, and of course I knew she must think highly of you for what you did for her, and—and—because you are such a splendid fellow, Merry. I naturally wanted her to think as much of me as I fancied she thought of you."

"And she does," laughed Merriwell. "I could see that with half an eye. You are solid there, Bart, and whenever I can say a good word for you, you may be sure I shall do it."

"Thank you," said Hodge. "You're the finest fellow in the world, Merry, and the best friend I've got. I'm beginning to believe, myself, that she thinks a good deal of me, and I have you to thank for it largely."

"Not a bit of it, Bart. A girl doesn't like a fellow merely because he is spoken well of by his friends. If she likes him it's because—— Well, just because she likes him. That's about as near as anybody can explain it, I guess."

Hodge glanced at his watch.

"I must be off, for I have to station myself about a mile east of you. I couldn't rest, though, till I'd let you know how I felt. Good-by."

"Good-by," cried Merriwell. "Let me wish you luck, both in the drive to-day and with Miss Dean. Look out for Sneed Parker!"

From the point where Frank stationed himself there stretched a rolling plain. He was on a slight eminence and could see nearly half of the great circle.

There were horsemen and bicyclists to the right of him and horsemen and bicyclists to the left of him. Nearly a mile away he observed Alice Dean wheel into position and caught the flutter of her handkerchief.

He knew she had recognized him and waved his handkerchief in return.

"I hope Hodge won't get jealous again," he thought, with a light laugh. "If the green-eyed monster hadn't robbed him of his usual discernment he might have seen from the first that I was disposed to give him the entire field there."

Then he thought of Inza Burrage and his red rival of the Taos Pueblo.

He took out his watch and noted the time.

"Only a few minutes to wait. It's a lovely afternoon. I feared it would be distressingly hot."

Five minute later the semicircle within the range of his vision began to contract and the coyote roundup had commenced.

Frank mounted his wheel and rode slowly down the rise, looking to the right and to the left, and scanning as well every grassy hollow in which a coyote might be hidden.

Both coyotes and jack rabbits were a great nuisance in the region round about Guthrie. The jack rabbits peeled the bark from the young fruit trees that the Oklahoma farmers were trying to grow, and the coyotes killed poultry and lambs, and even young calves. No greater service could be done to the settlers that to thin out these pests.

"That's a likely-looking place for one of the ras-

cals," thought Frank, as he turned his wheel toward some low ground where the grass grew thick and rank.

He was right in his surmise. As he came down the slope, with the wheel whirring over the hummocky places, a lean, skulking creature leaped out and sped away toward the southeast.

"Here, you are not going in the right direction!" Frank muttered, and began to pedal with all his might to get in ahead of the coyote and turn it in the desired course.

He succeeded after a short run, then decreased his speed and followed more slowly.

The coyote stopped and looked back at him occasionally. It did not seem to observe the wavering line of drivers. Now and then it broke into a trot or a swinging lope. Frank kept an eye on it, but did not crowd it, and gave it no apparent attention so long as it went in the direction he desired.

Before a mile was passed over another coyote sprang up off to the left. It was nearer Bart than Frank.

"Hodge may look after that," he concluded. "Two coyotes already. If the rest do as well as Hodge and I, we shall have a full net of the scamps."

He glanced toward the right and saw Alice Dean in pursuit of one that had broken cover close to her and was trying to get away.

"See her go!" exclaimed Frank. "She is as much at home on a wheel as she is on a horse. I don't wonder that Bart is stuck on her."

The coyote gave Alice Dean a lively chase, and it

took a spurt of more than half a mile before he was willing to recognize that it was much easier to go in the direction she wanted him than in the one he had chosen.

At the end of the second mile the coyote Bart was following joined the one pursued by Merriwell. They fronted about and stared at the wheelmen coming slowly toward them as if they wondered what new form of animal life they had encountered. They had no doubt seen horsemen and people on foot, but in all probability they had never before set their cunning, gleaming eyes on mounted bicyclists.

When satisfied with their inspection, and made uneasy by the nearer approach of the strange creatures that rolled along so easily and noiselessly, they turned about, thrust their noses suspiciously into the air, and were away again at a skulking lope.

Occasionally jack rabbits started up and bounded off with long leaps, but the members of the Guthrie Gun Club and their guests were after bigger game that day and paid no attention to the rabbits.

As the circle contracted more and more and the drivers neared the center, Frank saw that more than a dozen coyotes were inclosed. They were running nervously here and there and viewing with evident dismay the approach of their enemies. Occasionally one attempted to break out of the narrowing ring and there would be a lively chase to drive him in.

Smaller and still smaller grew the limits. The sun was already well down in the west. Some of the men began to yell. The coyotes dashed here and there,

but were driven back at every turn. Then the dogs were released from the wagons.

Like every other coward, a coyote will fight when cornered, and as the dogs dashed into their midst, the coyotes began to snap in their vicious way, drawing blood wherever their sharp teeth touched, and sending more than one dog back, reeling and howling.

There were more coyotes than dogs, and Frank soon began to see some of the liveliest fighting he had ever witnessed.

The coyotes were no match for the dogs, though, and he saw that one by one they would soon be overpowered and killed.

Then an animal he had mistaken for a coyote, though it was larger than the others, and which he now saw to be a big gray wolf, broke through the line of dogs and people and reached the open plain.

"Don't let it get away!" he heard some one yell, and saw several dash after it.

Frank changed his course and was off after it like a flash. He heard a clatter of hoofs and knew that some of the horsemen were joining in the chase. Then, looking straight ahead of him at the runaway wolf, he put his weight on the pedals, and his bicycle seemed to fairly fly over the short grass.

The wolf was a long-legged, long-winded creature, and went across the plain like a streak. The horsemen soon abandoned the chase, and one by one the bicyclists began to drop out.

Frank looked sharply at the bicyclist in front of him, and to his surprise saw that it was Sneed Parker. He

glanced quickly over his shoulder. There was only one bicyclist in his wake, and that was a Guthrie man whom he did not recognize.

"I won't be beaten in a race of this kind by Sneed Parker!" he muttered through his set teeth. "I'll distance him, if I don't succeed in overhauling the wolf. I must acknowledge, though, that I didn't think he could ride as he is doing."

Frank's bicycle now seemed to take the speed of wings as he bent over the handlebars and sent it flying along.

Yard by yard he gained on Sneed Parker. The sun became a big red ball on the horizon's rim. With a spurt Frank passed Parker and pedaled after the wolf. He glanced back, saw a fierce look of hate sweep across Parker's face, and observed that the other wheelman had dropped out of the race some time before.

The wolf was reeling and staggering. It made a last leap and fell prone on the grass. When Frank reached its side it was dead.

Parker came up panting and exhausted.

"It was game to the last," said Frank, filled with admiration and pity.

But he did not tell Parker that it was not simply a desire to overtake the wolf that made him maintain the race so persistently.

"I haven't any pity for it," Parker declared. "There isn't a single redeeming trait in one of those creatures."

Frank looked about him and at the descending sun and was filled with surprise. The brief twilight would soon be on them. The country was unfamiliar. At



one side was a ragged, rocky ravine, on whose rim the wolf had died.

Sneed Parker took in the configuration of the country at the same time. The black look of hate came back into his face.

Then, as Frank stooped to examine the wolf, Parker suddenly sprang upon him.

"Down you go!" he madly hissed.

Frank was given no time to defend himself. He tried to turn and grapple with the man, but, with a savage thrust, Parker sent him whirling over the brink.

A cry of horror was wrung from the lips of the unfortunate boy.

Then there was a dull, sodden thud, and—~~s~~ilence.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### PARKER'S VILLAINY.

Sneed Parker trembled like a leaf as he bent over the rim of the ravine and looked down upon Frank Merriwell. He was still winded and shaky from his long and hard run, but it was not this that made him tremble so violently. He believed he had killed the youth.

Frank lay in a heap where he had fallen, with one arm doubled under him.

"He'll not interfere again in the affairs of other people!" Parker hissed through his blue lips. "I didn't expect to catch him at such a disadvantage, and he was a fool for permitting me to do so."

The temptation to hurl Merriwell into the ravine had come upon Sneed Parker with sudden and irresistible force. He hated Merriwell as he had seldom hated any one, but he had not really contemplated slaying Merriwell in cold blood. What he wanted to do was to injure Frank in some way, to maim him, if possible, or make him seem to the people of Guthrie a scoundrel and scamp.

As he looked gloating down into the ravine he uttered a gurgling cry, while his face grew whiter and pastier.

He fancied he detected a movement, a sign of life.

"Shall I have to kill him yet?" he whispered. "It

will never do for him to crawl back to town and tell what I've done. No! I must finish the job!"

If Frank had moved he did not move again. The last red rays of the sinking sun fell on Parker's ghastly face, making them seem the face of a fiend lighted by the fires of an inferno.

"I must run no risks!" he whispered again, still staring into the ravine with distended eyes. "I must make sure of my work!"

The fear of the crime he contemplated made him shudder.

"This is not a time for squeamishness," was his reflection. "It will be the easiest thing in the world to finish him just as he lies, with never a mark or sign that can be detected to tell of it."

Still he appeared to hesitate. He lifted himself erect and looked carefully around over the wide stretch of hill and plain. No living thing was in sight. The sun had set and the twilight was thickening. He glanced at the dead wolf and at Frank's bicycle.

"Yes, the easiest thing in the world. When he is found, it will be thought he rode over the edge of the ravine and fell to his death. It has come about better than I could possibly have planned it."

He stared into the ravine again, running his eyes searchingly up and down it.

"If I had a little water—just a drop."

He was sure, though, before he looked, that no water was to be found anywhere near.

"It will be dark soon. And he may come back to consciousness. I must hurry."

He sought out a place where he might descend easily, and let himself down beside the form of the insensible youth.

With the practiced skill of a physician, he put his fingers on Frank's wrist and laid a hand on the feebly-beating heart.

"He's not hurt half as bad as I fancied," he shakingly declared. "He would come out of this soon. He must have bones and muscles like iron."

The discovery startled him.

Taking a physician's case out of an inner pocket, he opened it on the ground beside him, and selected from it a tiny phial containing a powder. He also took out the three hypodermic syringes which the case contained and placed them on the ground. The darkness was increasing in the ravine and he felt that he must work quickly. The gloom gave him a greater feeling of security, however.

From the case he took another small phial, which contained a liquid like water. Upon the broad blade of a knife he dropped some of the powder, and then moistened it with the liquid. This he agitated with the sharp point of a cutting knife until it was of a consistency to suit him. Then he drew it into the syringe.

Taking the syringe in his right hand, he was about to look for a place on Frank's arm or shoulder where he might insert its point without much chance of the puncture being detected, when a noise on the rim of the ledge gave him an uncomfortable start.

He came near dropping the syringe in his agitation.

"What was that?" he hoarsely whispered.

He laid the syringe on the ground and stood erect, intently listening, while his face worked strangely.

"Pshaw!" he said. "Suppose some one should come, I could tell them that Merriwell had fallen over here and I was trying to help him."

Still, the reflection did not banish his uneasiness. He was sure he had heard a sound, and he could not free himself of the uncomfortable feeling that some one was crouching on the rim of the ravine, peering down at him.

"I must find out what that was," he muttered. "Heavens! how my heart beats! If any one should see me, and then slip away and tell of it afterward."

He turned back with cautious steps, and mounted stealthily to the level ground above, glancing here and there to detect any one who might be in hiding.

A small prairie owl flew up almost under his feet and disappeared in silent flight.

Sneed Parker sunk down with a startled, gasping cry.

"By all the fiends, I thought that was a man!" he gurgled.

For almost a minute he sat there, weak as water.

Then, noticing how rapidly the twilight was fading, he climbed back into the ravine as quickly as his shaking limbs would carry him, and again approached Frank.

"I must do the thing at once and get away," was his thought. "How dark it is getting down here. I wonder what has become of the rest of the crowd?"

He reached down for the syringe, and with his left

hand bared Merriwell's arm. His fingers touched a slight cut where the arm had come in contact with a point of rock.

"Just the thing," gloatingly, and with a return of confidence. "I can stab the point of the syringe in there and defy the keenest doctor to discover the mark."

Frank stirred uneasily and groaned.

"He's returning to consciousness," thought Parker. "Once this is beneath his skin, though, and he'll pass into the sleep that knows no waking. Ah-h!"

The last was a deep-drawn sigh, forced from his lips as the point of the syringe was plunged into the arm at the place selected and the syringe was pressed into the veins.

He drew away the instrument and stood tremblingly erect.

"The deed is done!" he muttered. "Nothing can save him now. There was enough poison in that to kill ten men. He will not live an hour!"

Still trembling, he stooped and hastily restored the phials, knives and syringes to the medicine case, which he again carefully placed in an inner pocket of his coat.

"It isn't a bad thing to be a doctor, in a case like this," he reflected, as he climbed again to the rim of the ravine. "His friends will not suspect anything, even when he is found. I must roll the bicycle over, though. Then they will be sure he fell down there and was killed."

The brief twilight was almost gone. Frank, lying prone on the bottom of the ravine, seemed only a black patch of earth or stone. Out on the plain there was



no movement or sign of life. The evening breeze swayed the grass and cooled Sneed Parker's burning cheeks.

Parker rolled the bicycle to the edge of the ravine, then pushed it over. It seemed to shoot out into the thickening darkness, and struck with a rebounding crash.

"Good-by, Mr. Frank Merriwell!" Parker whispered. "You're not the first man that has made the big mistake of interfering in the affairs of other people. When I see you again, if I ever do, you'll be on a stretcher or in an icebox."

Then Parker mounted his own bicycle and fled away like a specter through the dim twilight.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### LOST.

"Lordy massy sakes teh goose-grease!" groaned Toots, with lugubrious emphasis. "If dis po' nigger had 'a' dre'mp ob de trubble he was gwan teh git in, he wouldn't nebber gone chargin' round after no sky-otes, you heah me! No, sar! He'd 'a' stayed in de toown, whar de 'lectrum lights am shinin'. Dis bizness meks mah heart turn reg'lar flip-flops—yes, sar!"

"Makes me wish I was back to hum on the farm," declared Ephraim Gallup. "Darn my punkins, I'll stay there when I git there, too!"

"Yah!" snorted Hans Dunnerwust. "You petter belief me, ven I gid me some blace I von't nefer come pack, alretty yet!"

"Faith, an' thot's roight!" chimed in Barney Mulloy. "It's the b'atin'est counthry to git lost in thot iver wor made. Oi wondher pwhere the other fellys air by this toime? But nivver a bit av good will it do to whoine. Pwhat was thot now, begobs? Oi thought Oi saw a loight across there."

Barney, Toots, Dunnerwust and Gallup were wheeling slowly through the night, not knowing what direction to take, and made miserable by the thought that they were lost.

The dogs had not been able to kill all the coyotes. In the final rush three of the coyotes succeeded in

breaking through the circle of men and dogs, and ran for their lives, each in a different direction.

Dunnerwust, Gallup, Toots and Mulloy flew after one of these. It made for a bit of broken country and escaped, and when its pursuers were ready to rejoin the other members of the party, they found themselves unable to do so.

They did not make this alarming discovery until they crossed a ridge which they believed separated them from their friends and saw before them an unfamiliar region. Then they knew they had become turned around as to direction.

When they arrived at the crest of what they believed to be the right ridge the sun was sinking and their friends were not to be seen.

After they had wheeled on and on, for hours as it seemed to them, seeing now and then the gleam of a light in a settler's house, which when they rode toward it, always disappeared and left them more bewildered than ever.

"It's only another one of them willer-wisps that we've been chasin' all night," growled Gallup.

"Don'd you pelief me! Id vos somedings else!" declared Hans. "Dot lighd vas a camp-fire dot id come vrom."

"An' begobs, Oi sane the two legs av a mon walkin' in front av it!" said Mulloy.

Toots stopped and jumped off his wheel.

"What in thutteration is the matter with you, now?" demanded Gallup.

"Yo' don't git dis nigger teh ride up to nuffin' like

dat," gurgled Toots. "No, sar! I done lose mah rabbit foot las' week, an' mah healt has been po' ebber sence. Dat ain't no sho' nuff honest light comin' from house whar white folkses lives. Dat's Injuns!"

Toots' fear that the light came from an Indian camp-fire was wonderfully disconcerting to all except Barney, and but for his assertions that Oklahoma was no longer a part of the Indian Territory, and that the Indians down there were mostly civilized and peaceably disposed anyway, it would have been given a wide berth. They might have avoided it at any rate, but for the hope that it might be a fire kindled by members of their party, who were lost like themselves.

As they drew near they beheld the dim outlines of horses beyond the fire and saw three men squatting on the ground, smoking. The camp had not been long pitched, for the horses were grazing hungrily and a frying pan on the fire sent up an odor of burning grease.

"Oi'm moighty sure thim fellys air setthlers," Mulloy asserted, as these details were observed. "Anyway, they're whoite men an' they won't hurt us, begobs! Faith, if they can tell us which way it is thot we're wantin' to go, it will be a dale av a favor!"

Hans and Toots, who were on the point of wheeling away from the dangerous vicinity, took fresh courage at this, and followed Mulloy and Gallup up toward the camp, though not without considerable reluctance and hesitation.

The men did not hear the noiseless wheels, and so

the boys were close to the fire before they were seen. Then the men leaped up hastily.

"It's fri'nds we air!" cried Barney Mulloy, riding into the circle of light, closely followed by the others. "And Oi'm hoping that we can say the same av you, whin we know you better."

"I can't say that we wuz expectin' any visitors to-night," declared a big, black-bearded fellow, who seemed to be the leader of the trio, looking suspiciously at the dismounting bicyclists. "Leastways we didn't expect 'em to come in a-straddlin' balloon-rimmed wheels. Whether we're to be friends er not I can't say, as I don't remember that I ever had the pleasure of meetin' up with any of you gents before."

"By chaowder, I don't like the looks of that feller!" whispered Gallup, speaking as much to himself as to any one else. "If I was away frum here, gol darned ef I wouldn't stay away."

"Set down!" the black-bearded fellow commanded, pointing to a place beside the fire. "It'll look sociable, and we kin talk better. Whatever might yer names be? I don't recollect 'em, if you said!"

"Me name is Barney Mulloy, and——"

The words floated up to Frank Merriwell, who lay not far away, in a condition of half consciousness, and brought back his drifting senses.

Frank Merriwell was not dead!

He was not even seriously injured.

For a long time he had been lying there, in a half-waking and half-dreaming state.

He started up now, only to sink back with a moan

of pain. The arm that was twisted under him gave a sharp stab. He felt deathly sick, too. He wondered what had happened to him.

Then, like a flash, came back the memory of the wolf chase, of Sneed Parker's clutching fingers, and of his fall into the ravine.

In his haste and excitement Sneed Parker had blundered. He had picked up from the ground the wrong hypodermic syringe. The poison prepared with such deadly hate had not entered Frank Merriwell's arm. In its stead, Parker had injected a dose of the morphia preparation he habitually used on himself. It had thrown Frank into a deep and unnatural sleep, but had not otherwise injured him.

Merriwell sat up again, in spite of his nausea and the pain in his arm and side, and stared toward the camp-fire, whence came the sound of voices that he recognized. The camp was in the mouth of the ravine.

He put out his hand and it touched a tire of the bicycle, which lay beside him. Then he arose staggeringly to his feet, feeling faint and weak.

"I must have lain here a long time," was his thought. "I suppose the boys came hunting for me. That's Gallup talking now. And I must have fallen like a house, I'm so shaken up. No doubt Parker fancied he had killed me, but I'm worth a dozen dead men, if I do feel sore in every joint. My! how that arm aches!" He paused. "Hello, there's trouble!"

"Yeou're a gol dern good feller, Mr. Balder, I haven't a mite o' doubt, but yeou'll excuse me ef I don't set daown there," Merriwell heard Gallup say.



"I've been settin' on that bicycle till it's 'most hatched, an' I'd ruther stand up a spell."

The peculiar manner in which the boy from Vermont said this quickened Frank's attention. He looked toward the fire and saw Dunnerwust, Toots and Mulloy squatted in a row before the fire, occupying places made for them by the trio, who were now all standing.

Then Frank saw the big, black-bearded man, addressed by Gallup as Balder, signal to his companions and throw himself on the boy from Vermont.

But Balder quickly discovered that the subjugation of Ephraim Gallup was not to be the easy thing he had fancied. When attacked the boy from Vermont aroused himself and flailed away like a windmill.

Gallup had been suspicious and almost on the point of running away. Set upon by the big fellow, he now put forth all his strength, and succeeded in hurling Balder from him.

Toots and Mulloy were assaulted at the same moment, while Hans, leaping to his feet, put his short legs in motion and ran up the ravine straight toward the point where Frank Merriwell stood.

Merriwell forgot his aches and injuries on beholding this strange scene, and, picking up a stone, he rushed to the assistance of his imperiled friends, at the same time crying:

"At them, fellows! We've got them now! Cut them off from their horses! Don't let one of them escape!"

His shouts, and the patter of his feet and Dunner-

wust's, were echoed by the walls of the ravine, making the scoundrels think a force was coming.

"Git! Scoot!" commanded Balder.

With the words, he dashed for the open plain, followed by his comrades, all three running as if their lives depended on their efforts.

The Dutch boy turned back, when he heard Merriwell's voice, and Mulloy and Toots picked themselves bewilderedly from the ground.

Ephraim Gallup was shaking as with an ague, while Hans' teeth could be heard to rattle like dice.

"Is that you, Frank?" Gallup questioned. "I never was so thunderin' sca't in all my life, by gum! My knees is that weak an' shivery that I'm blest if I don't think I'll haf to set daown. Do yeou s'pose them fellers air goin' yit? I hope, b'gosh, that they'll run clean out of Oklahomy, 'fore they stop! It'll make me feel better."

"Come back into the ravine," ordered Merriwell. "I don't want them to discover how few we are. Stop your howling, Toots, and get a move on you!"

In the darkness of the place the story of how Frank had been hurled into the ravine by Sneed Parker was listened to by them with indignation and amazement.

"I am confident that those three fellows are fugitives from justice," said Frank, when the talk turned back to the campers and their strange attack. "When I shouted that way they must have fancied a sheriff's posse was trying to surround them, and that your coming was only a trick to trap them more effectively. I don't see why they should have run so, otherwise. If

my guess is right, they will not be in a hurry to come back, even though they have left their horses. So, if my bicycle isn't smashed, we'll make a run out of this and try to get back to Guthrie. I'm pretty sore, and I don't seem to have much more strength than a kitten, but I'll try mighty hard to make the ride, and I believe I can figure out the direction from the stars."

"Begobs, it will be bettther than anny one av us could do, thin!" said Mulloy. "The small ixperience Oi've had thryin' to foind a thrack acrass these pay-raries makes me willin' to confiss thot Oi'm a failyure at that business. The doin's av that Dr. Parker goes beyant annything Oi ivver heard av in me loife. Oi'll take pl'asure in helpin' yez murther him for thot, Merriwell, so Oi will!"

"When I've wiped my feet of the hull derved country, I'll feel better!" said the boy from Vermont, gravely.

"Eff I don'd feel der same vays, you vos a liar!" chimed in Dunnerwust. "Id vos nod some gountrys to haf fun in loke a white mans, py shimminy!"

"Or a gem'm ob colah, either!" gurgled Toots. "Mah goodness, no!"

"The wheel is all right," said Merriwell, with a sigh of relief, when he had given it such inspection as he could in the gloom. "Some of the spokes are bent, but it will carry me all right, I think. Now, if we had the other wheels back here!"

Toots glanced with staring eyes toward the mouth of the ravine and drew back, a movement in which he

was imitated by Dunnerwust, while Gallup's jaw dropped.

"By chaowder, I don't like the idee of goin' aout there, but I allow ef it has to be done, I can go dew it."

"Barney and I will bring them in," said Frank. "Be ready to mount as soon as we come back, for we must get out of here without delay."

The venture was successfully made. Not a sound was heard to indicate that the three men who had so wildly fled were anywhere near.

A few moments later Frank and his friends rode out of the ravine on their bicycles, and pedaled swiftly away in the course figured out by Frank as the right one.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE ROBBERY OF THE BANK.

Guthrie was reached in the gray of the dawn. After leaving word of his return for the friends who might be anxious about him and the other missing members of the party, Frank went to his room and to bed, for he needed rest and sleep. He was still sore from the effects of his fall, but he knew he would be all right in a few days, and his heart was filled with gratitude for his preservation. Yet he did not dream how diabolical had been the attempt made on his life by Sneed Parker.

He was still undetermined whether to make public Parker's murderous assault or keep it a close secret among his friends when he dressed and went downstairs for dinner. He had warned those with whom he had ridden home from the ravine to say nothing about it, and he knew he could rely on them.

The Oklahoma Hotel was already filled with members of the gun club and their friends. Whenever Frank's party was known to be there, the parlors were thronged with their admirers, of whom they never seemed to have a greater number than in the bustling, booming little city of Guthrie.

To the many questions of the Guthrie people, Frank replied briefly that he followed the wolf so far he could not return to the coyote hunters, and that he then fell in with some members of his party who were turned

around as to direction and wheeled with them. He did not mention Parker's name, but he learned that Parker was in town, and had been seen on the streets but a short time before.

The gun club had arranged a shoot for the afternoon at their grounds just beyond the corporation limits, and Frank Merriwell and Bart Hodge left the hotel immediately after dinner for the purpose of targeting their shotguns.

This they did by setting up a paper target marked with a thirty-six inch circle, firing at it at a distance of thirty yards. If the shots were distributed closely and evenly over this circle and the penetration was good, the gun was likely to give satisfaction in the shoot. If the shot "bunched," three or four being together in one spot and a half dozen together in another spot, with big spaces between, or if not enough shot were put into the circle, the chances were that in shooting at glass balls or clay pigeons the gun would do the same. Hence the shooter might draw true on a flying clay pigeon and miss it clean, the pigeon escaping contact with the shot by reason of the spaces or the thin distribution of the charge.

Neither of Frank's two guns gave entire satisfaction, though Bart's seemed to be all right. One of Frank's guns "scattered," or spread the shot too widely; the other was a choke-bored gun, made for close, hard shooting at long range, and at thirty yards it threw the shot almost in a mass.

"You might as well use a rifle as that thing," said



Hodge, looking at the "pattern" made by the gun on the target.

"But it's the one I shall shoot," Merriwell declared. "The other is altogether too unreliable. If I draw on a ball with this, I'll know that I'm dead certain to get it."

"The difficulty is to draw true on the ball," Hodge objected.

"Yes, that is the difficulty, but I think I can do it most of the time. This would be a great gun for antelope hunting, or coyotes. By the way, did you see Sneed Parker this morning?"

"Yes, I saw him!" Hodge growled. "I was walking with Alice—with Miss Dean. You can't imagine what a look he gave me. He would murder me if he got a chance, just as he tried to do you last night. I don't think I shall be able to get out of this town without punching his head. If I ever do jump on him, I'll reckon in your score with mine."

"And Miss Dean?" Frank questioned.

"She is just the nicest girl!" Bart declared, with a flush. "Did you ever see a girl that could ride a horse or a wheel as she does? She's going to take part in the shoot, too, this afternoon, she told me."

"Then I shall have to look to my laurels!"

Bart laughed.

"That's just what you will, Merry, in my opinion. I've heard a number of people say that she is an uncommonly good shot. There come some more fellows, drawn by the reports of our guns!"

The shoot was set for two o'clock, and when that

hour arrived a number of people were collected on the grounds. Many of the business men of the town were there, and more were expected. The sports and the guests of the Guthrie Gun Club were creating much interest.

But Sneed Parker did not make his appearance at the opening of the shoot, and Alice Dean was also absent, to the great regret of Bart Hodge.

Just as the shooting commenced three men rode quickly into the town from a direction opposite the grounds of the gun club. They were splendidly mounted and wore black cloth half-masks. The one who rode in front and was apparently the leader was a large man with a black beard.

They dismounted in the narrow street at the rear of the Traders' Bank and threw their bridle reins to the two half-breeds, Indian Joe and Jimmy Crookleg, who were evidently waiting to receive them. The half-breeds had other horses saddled and in readiness at their camp across the street.

At the same moment a man stepped from the doorway, where he had been in waiting, and joined the three horsemen as they walked toward the bank. He was dressed in rough clothing, had gloves on his hands, and wore on his face a mask that concealed every feature.

"Everything has worked fine," he whispered. "You're just in the nick of time. Old Dean has taken a stroll out to the grounds of the club and there's no one inside but the teller."

"Have ye got ther combination?" the black-bearded

man asked. "We want to do this job up quick, and light out 'fore the men at the shoot gits onto us."

"Trust me for that," laughed Parker. "I haven't been chinning the old gent and courting the girl all this time for nothing. I can go into that safe as easily as the cashier himself."

"Correct! Come on, then. We don't want to lose a minute."

He stepped through the rear door, dropping a hand to his hip and producing a big revolver.

The others imitated his example and crowded close at his heels.

The teller, who was bending over a ledger, with his back to the window, faced about when he heard their steps.

The next instant he found himself looking straight into the muzzle of a revolver held by the black-bearded bandit.

"No monkey bizness, now, er I'll put a bullet plum through you," was the stern command. "We're hyer fer the stuff, and we're goin' to have it!"

Though the teller quailed before the weapon, he was a man of courage and fertile brain. He believed the robbers would not shoot him for fear of arousing the town. Thus reckoning, he leaped to one side and dived toward a desk which held a weapon, intending to fire a shot as an alarm.

This movement on the part of the teller somewhat disconcerted the robbers.

The black-bearded man, who was none other than Balder, ran around the railing and through the railing

door. His two followers hurried after him. But Sneed Parker leaped over the railing, with a springy bound, and was the first to reach the teller, who, with his right hand thrust into a drawer, was trying to get out a pistol.

Parker had not anticipated this resistance and it threw him into a rage. He flew at the teller and sought to hurl him away from the drawer and keep him from getting the weapon.

Then a struggle ensued, which was not ended until Balder ran up and hammered the teller over the head with the butt of his revolver, speedily reducing him to a state of insensibility.

The masks of both Balder and Parker came off in the struggle, and they seemed to feel that they could not spare the time to put them on again.

"Quick!" whispered Parker. "Scoop up the bills and change from the desk, while I unlock the safe!"

He turned to see that the order was being obeyed.

At that instant Alice Dean started to enter the bank by the front door. She came to a halt in the doorway, a cry of terror issued from her lips, while the gun she carried fell from her nerveless hands. She had recognized Sneed Parker, and saw that he was assisting in an attempt to rob the bank. Beyond Parker she observed the teller lying on the floor as if dead.

"Stop her!" Parker commanded.

One of the men ran toward her, but she sprang back into the street.

Her first thoughts were of her father, of Frank Merriwell's party, and of the members of the gun club.

"I must tell them!" she panted. "The bank is being robbed, and Sneed Parker——"

She heard the thud of heavy boots behind her, and fear lent wings to her feet. The bandit's order for her to halt only made her run the faster. Across the open lot in front of the bank and out toward the commons she scurried, too frightened to call aloud, believing herself closely pursued.

When the robber saw he could not overtake her without a lively chase he ran back into the building.

Sneed Parker was down on his knees in front of the safe, working at the combination.

"There's something wrong here," he heard Parker say. "No, that's it! Have you got the other money in the bag? Then bring it here, quick!"

The door of the safe flew open and Parker thrust in his hands and began to pull out the treasure. Balder produced a canvas bag and crowded into it the bank notes and coin as fast as they were produced.

"No use to run after that girl," announced the bandit who had tried to overhaul Alice. "Couldn't ketch her no more than a whirlwind. We'll jist git on the hosses and skedaddle soon as you're ready."

Parker leaped up.

"You must catch her, Balder!" he cried. "She saw the faces of both of us. We'll be hunted down and captured, no matter where we go, if you don't. Don't let her reach the shooting grounds. Take Indian Joe's big black horse. He can go like the wind."

Balder caught up his mask and put it on, but the string that held it in place was broken and it fell off as

he mounted the black, whose bridle rein Indian Joe tossed to him.

An alarm seemed to be spreading through the town. Balder felt that he could not delay a moment longer. He set the black in motion, and tried to knot a red handkerchief about his head and face as a disguise, but failed. Then, in a spirit of desperation, he plunged the spurs into the flanks of the gallant black steed and went across the vacant lot like an arrow shot from a bow.



## CHAPTER XX.

### FRANK MERRIWELL'S SHOT.

"That was a pretty shot," commented Frank, picking up his gun and running his fingers over an open box of loaded shells. "I doubt if many here could do that, Mr. Maloney. One of those flyers, that go off like that at a tangent, is the most difficult of all for me."

The shooting was under way. Out in front of the active participants two clay pigeon "traps" were at work, hurling the saucer-shaped "birds" swiftly through the air. The bang, bang of the guns rang out sharply.

Frank selected two shells, or cartridges, flung open the breech of his gun and inserted them in the barrels, closing the gun with a snap.

Maloney stepped aside and another Guthrie man went forward to shoot. Frank's turn came next.

Alice Dean was already on the grounds of the gun club, running as rapidly as her trembling limbs could bear her. Behind her, but much farther away, rode Balder, on the black.

But neither of them were seen or heard, so absorbed were the shooters and their friends in the gun club contest. The crack of the guns served also to keep the hoofstrokes of Balder's horse from being noticed.

Alice Dean's eyes were fixed on her father, who was

advancing leisurely in front of her. But her father, looking toward the men standing near the traps, did not at first hear her. It was not strange that he did not, for, though she tried to call out and attract his attention, her voice scarcely rose above a panting whisper.

But the thunder of the hoofs of Balder's horse could not long escape attention. Silas Dean's ears caught them first, and he turned curiously about, without a thought of what he was to see.

He reeled and came near falling to the ground when he saw his daughter pursued by that rough-looking man, from whom she fled in such terror. But he quickly regained control of himself and started toward her, shouting loudly.

The shout reached Frank and the others gathered at the traps.

"Balder!" was Merriwell's ejaculation. "What can that mean?"

The black horse was now only a few yards behind Alice Dean, and Balder was leaning from the saddle with hand outstretched to seize her. Her steps were fairly tottering.

Merriwell took in everything at a glance. The girl in shooting costume, with short skirts and fringed leggins, the white-haired old cashier hurrying toward her, and the outlaw thundering down on the black horse.

Balder swerved the horse slightly, drew in on the rein, and, stooping from the saddle as he passed the

girl, caught her about the waist and lifted her to the horse in front of him.

Alice Dean was in a half faint and incapable of further exertion. She lay across the horse without a struggle as Balder plied the spur again and thundered on.

"Save my daughter!" cried the unhappy father, racing wildly after. "Will not some one save my daughter from that villain?"

The whole scene was enacted very quickly. The Guthrie man, with his eyes fixed on the trap, did not understand what was occurring until the black was thundering by.

But Frank Merriwell's mind and hands worked with equal quickness. He saw that the only way to stop the horseman was to kill or cripple the horse. This he could not hope to do with the shot charges that were in his gun. They would serve to stop a quail or rabbit, but nothing that was much larger.

In the box at his feet were two or three shells loaded with buckshot. There was talk of a coyote hunt with guns for the next day, and the Guthrie dealer who furnished the shells had put in these buckshot charges, requesting Frank to test them.

Frank snatched up one of these shells, threw open the breech of his gun, extracted the shell that held the small shot and inserted the buckshot charge in its place.

His nerves were like steel as he threw the shotgun to his face and drew down on the running horse.

"I must shoot low or I may hit the girl," he reflected.

"I'll pull for the horse's heart, and if I get that rascal's leg it will be all the better."

Then he firmly pressed the trigger and the gun spitefully roared out its contents.

No hands could have been steadier, no aim truer. At the crack of Merriwell's gun the black horse pitched heavily forward, shot through the heart.

Balder and the girl were hurled from the horse's back. Balder tried to get on his feet and draw a weapon, but sank down with a cry of pain. Some of the shot had penetrated his leg and shattered the bone. Seeing he must submit to the inevitable, he threw up his hands and surrendered with the best grace possible.

Bart Hodge was the first to reach Alice Dean. She lay where she had fallen, limp and apparently lifeless.

"Water!" Bart cried, supporting her head.

It was brought hurriedly in a tin dipper, and when Silas Dean gained her side, half delirious with anxiety, the water was being sprinkled in her face, and she was struggling back to consciousness.

"The bank!" Alice panted, as soon as she could speak. "It is being robbed! I ran to tell you, and he caught me. Sneed Parker is with the robbers!"

The information came like the explosion of a bomb. There was a moment of bewilderment and indecision, then the crowd ran wildly in the direction of the bank.

Before they reached it they saw five men, with led horses, ride out of the narrow street that ran in the rear of the building. Two of the men they recognized as Indian Joe and Jimmy Crookleg, and they knew

from the statements of Alice Dean that one of the others was Dr. Sneed Parker.

"We must not let them escape," cried Merriwell, leading the way on a run toward a nearby livery stable. "Get horses and follow them at once!"

The telegraph flashed the news of the bank robbery to all the adjacent towns, and, with the aid of sheriffs' posses from other places, Sneed Parker and his companions were run to earth the next day and forced to surrender.

The money taken from the bank was recovered. And Frank and his friends, the guests of the Guthrie Gun Club, were publicly thanked for the heroic part they took in the capture.

Bart Hodge called on Alice Dean at her father's house before leaving Guthrie. She was quite recovered from the shock of her fall from the horse and the excitement she had undergone, and greeted Bart with a warmth that made his heartbeats quicken.

"Perhaps we shall never meet again," she said, as he arose to go, and Bart fancied that her voice trembled a little.

"If you want me to come again," said Bart, with sudden boldness, "rest assured I shall endeavor to do so. Guthrie is not far from the East, in these days of railways and fast trains."

When the boys left the town all were in a thoughtful mood.

"Sure, an' we have had adventures enough," sighed Barney. "It's mesilf as would loike a rist."

"I guess we all agree with you," smiled Frank.

It had been decided to turn toward Arkansas, as some of the lads wished to see that section of our country.

"All right, Arkansas it is," said Bruce, with a yawn. "But no more adventures, mind that. The fellow who stirs up an adventure gets fined ten dollars."

"That's the tay to walk, no, way to talk!" cried Harry. "No more adventures until we get back to Yale."

At this Toots set up a wild laugh.

"Gwine ter keep out ob percitements, hey?" he roared. "Not much you ain't, not wid Frank Merriwell along. Why, dat boy jess libs on percitements, yo' heah dis chile?"

And the others heard—and had good cause to remember only a few days later.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE RACE THROUGH THE FOREST.

"I'll catch that chap if I have to chase him all the way to the Mississippi!" vowed Frank, exasperatedly.

Frank was aroused. He had not believed it possible a bicyclist could run away from him in a fair race on an open road.

He had met with a surprise.

Four times he had nearly overtaken an unknown boy on a very ordinary-looking wheel, only to have the stranger look over his shoulder, see him, and spurt away with such ease that Merry scarcely could believe the evidence of his eyes.

How it was done puzzled Frank, for it did not seem that the unknown exerted himself to his utmost to accomplish the feat.

"His legs must be run by steam," exclaimed Merriwell; "or there is a hidden motor attached to that machine!"

They were riding through Eastern Arkansas between Brinkley and Forrest City. At best, the roads were bad, and in places they were wretched. It was a poor country for wheeling.

Dense forests abounded, and low, marshy land was everywhere. At Little Rock, Frank and his party had started to ride to Memphis, with the object of attending a great bicycle meet that was to be held there.

Before the White River region was reached the boys were heartily disgusted, but they were plucky and did not like to give up. They felt sure the country was as bad and the roads as wretched as possible. It did not seem possible things could grow worse as they went on.

They had left Brinkley together for a run to Forrest City, a distance of forty miles, resolved to proceed from the latter place by rail if the roads did not improve.

Everywhere they met negroes. It seemed that, outside the towns, about nine-tenths of the population consisted of colored people.

Toots had shown great indignation when Rattleton had suggested that they might lose him there, as it was possible he would become enamored by some dark-skinned maiden.

"G'way dar, boy!" he had cried. "What you' took dis chile fo'! I's a cullud gemman ob 'finement, an' I don' want nuffin' teh do wif dis lowdown brack trash. If dar's anyfing 'fensive teh me it's a common ignerant brack nigger."

Naturally Frank took the lead, and, happening to feel pretty well, he set a hot pace for the others. After a time they fell back, and he was alone some distance in advance when he discovered another boy, mounted on a wheel, riding in the same direction.

The stranger was pedaling along leisurely, and Frank, surprised beyond measure to see a wheelman there, put on steam to overtake him.

"He may know something about the roads between here and Memphis," thought Merriwell. "I'll ask him some questions."

As Frank drew near the unknown happened to look around. Merry saw he was a freckle-faced youth of seventeen or eighteen, and he was not dressed in a suit for riding. He had on brown clothes which looked as if they were not very old, but had seen rough wear.

Detecting Frank, the stranger gave a sudden start, then bent over the low handlebars of his machine, increasing his speed with a sudden spurt that was surprising.

"Hello!" shouted Frank. "What's your hurry?"

There came no answer, and the rider seemed to put on more speed.

"Oh, will you!" exclaimed Frank, half laughing. "Well, I don't know about that! You may not find it such an easy trick to lose me."

Then he entered into the race in earnest, determined to run the stranger down.

Then it was that Frank met with a surprise, for, although he was doing his best, he soon found he was not gaining on the stranger. Worse still, he discovered that the stranger was steadily drawing away.

Setting his teeth, Frank worked for all there was in him, and still the unknown gained. A turn of the road enabled the stranger to pass from view in the dense forest, and Frank did not see him again for more than half an hour.

Pedaling steadily along, and wondering if the boy

in brown had not slipped into the forest with his wheel, abandoning the road to let him pass, Merry suddenly discovered him once more. He was riding along leisurely, as before.

Frank was on his mettle.

"I'll tire him out, if he'll stick to it!" he muttered, as he whirled along. "He'll find it isn't so easy to run away from me again."

But the stranger looked around, saw Frank once more, and again spurted away with such ease that Merriwell was utterly exasperated.

"How he can do it on this road is more than I can understand," came through his set teeth. "Either he is a wonder or he has a remarkable bicycle there."

Four times did the boy in brown permit Frank to almost overtake him and then ride away. Frank strained every nerve, and it is certain that such riding was never before done over the wretched roads of Eastern Arkansas.

Merriwell would not give up; he continued after the unknown with dogged persistency, determined to run him down if the race continued to the Mississippi.

It did not seem that the stranger could keep up his marvelous speed, for, after racing away from Frank he always slackened and permitted the pursuer to approach again.

Frank settled into a steady, hard pull that enabled him to cover mile after mile at high speed, refusing to spurt after the unknown when he became satisfied that such an effort was useless.

The dismal forest was on each hand. The ground was low and marshy, with occasional clearings, where miserable huts, set on stilts, were surrounded by idle negroes.

Wherever there were streams sawmills could be seen. Some of these mills were running, and the black laborers could be heard chanting in a droning manner that echoed through the forest. They always seemed to chant at their work, but they did not sing.

Sometimes a white man would be overseeing the labor, and his harsh commands would break in on the chanting. Occasionally the boss was a negro. Whenever this was the case he seemed to be trying to drive the laborers even harder than did the white bosses.

Frank decided that the eastern part of Arkansas was far from pleasant. It did not compare favorably with other portions of the State.

The boy in brown seemed exasperated that Frank should pursue him so closely. There was something about the fellow's back that impressed Frank unfavorably. One of his shoulders was higher than the other, and his head was set to one side. His hair was a faded red.

"Perhaps he is going to the bicycle meet in Memphis," thought Frank. Then came another thought that made Merriwell start:

"By Jove! if he is, he can capture the prizes in all the races! I wouldn't stand a show in a short race against him."

This was not a pleasant thought, for Frank had

hoped to add to the laurels of the Yale Combine by carrying off first honors in some of the races.

The more Merriwell thought about it the more uneasy he became. He wondered if it were possible that the boy in brown was such a remarkable rider, and, after meditating over that point somewhat, he decided that the fellow had a remarkable wheel.

"It must be geared much higher than mine," thought Frank. "And still it does not seem to cost him such a great effort to spurt away from me. By the way he rides I should not call him an expert. Here is a mystery."

Finally it seemed that the unknown was tempted to stop and meet Frank, but he changed his mind after wavering a bit, and drove ahead.

Frank put on more pressure and crowded the unknown. The stranger saw this, and bent to the work of running away again.

Bumping, swaying, slipping, the race continued over the wretched road. Gaping negroes stared at the two boys. Wenches threw up both hands and seemed frightened. Pickaninnies screamed for fear and ran away.

There was something wild and exhilarating about the pursuit—something that made Frank forget he was sweating from every pore and in the midst of miasma swamps, where the ague was in the very air.

He laughed through his set teeth.

The boy in brown turned a bend in the road and disappeared, still bouncing along at great speed.



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Frank came to the bend and whirled around the curve.

Then he came near running over something stretched in the middle of the road.

It was the boy he was pursuing.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A TRADE.

The mysterious bicycle lay near the boy in brown. Both were motionless now. Swerving quickly, Frank shot between bicycle and boy. Then he began to back pedal, and quickly leaped to the ground, turning about as soon as possible and retracing his steps.

The boy did not stir or look up. His arm was cramped beneath him and his hat was smashed down over his eyes.

"He took a tumble," said Frank, "and he is hurt."

In a moment Merriwell was kneeling at the side of the stranger. He turned the boy over and pulled the hat from his eyes.

The stranger groaned and opened his eyes, looking at Merriwell in a dazed way.

"That was a nasty fall, old man," said Frank, cheerfully; "but I think you will be all right after a bit. How do you feel?"

The dazed look vanished from the small, foxy eyes of the stranger. He sat up, rubbing his arm and shoulder.

"Gee!" he said, making a wry face.

"Lucky it didn't break your arm," declared Frank.

"Lucky nothin'!" grunted the other. "Who ever seen such a road? Well, you've caught me."

He said it as if he expected something unpleasant to follow.

"Yes," nodded Frank; "I was bound to do that, if I had to chase you all the way to Tennessee."

"How'd ye know I was goin' to Tennessee? I reckoned ev'rybody'd 'low I was goin' t'other way."

Frank laughed.

"You mean everybody who didn't see you," he said.

"I started for Texas, and I reckoned they'd be lookin' for me in that direction. I got too funny. I was trying to tucker you out chasin' me. This time I was goin' to run away for good, but I was throwed before I knowed it."

There was something queer about the stranger. His eyes were shifty, and he did not look Frank straight in the face. He continued to rub his shoulder, but looked around at his bicycle, as if he longed to jump up, mount quickly and try once more to outride Merriwell.

"Why didn't you hold on when I called you?" asked Frank.

"Think I'm a fool?"

"Why, no; but——"

Then the stranger began to look Frank over, as the latter hesitated. There were some moments of silence, and something like an expression of relief came to the freckled face of the boy in brown.

"I thought I knowed you," he said; "but I don't know but I was mistaken."

"I scarcely think we ever met before," said Merry. "Where are you from?"

"Why, I'm from—I'm from—— Don't you know?"

"No, of course not."

The stranger laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh but there was relief in it, as Frank plainly saw.

"Well, I'm from Powhatan?"

"Where's Powhatan?"

"And you don't know that? Why, it's away up north."

"North? Then how do you happen to be traveling in this direction. I thought you came from some place west."

"It's this a-way," said the other lad, quickly, with a crafty grin; "I run away."

"Oh, that's it?"

"Yep. Started for Texas."

"How did you happen to run away?"

"How? Why, I got tired of stayin' at home. Wasn't nothin' there fer me, anyhow. Never had a dollar of my own anyhow."

"Then how did you get that bicycle?"

"That? Why, you see I—I traded for it."

"Traded—what?"

"A—A colt. Dad gave me a colt, and I traded him for the bisuckle. He didn't like it, and he was goin' to make me trade back. I got mad—didn't want to give up the bisuckle—run away. See?"

"Yes, I see; and you thought——"

The boy in brown laughed again, and that laugh grated on Merry's nerves.

"I thought you was arter me," he confessed.

"That's why you ran from me?"

"Course it was. You look like a feller—a feller that lives up nigh Powhatan. I judged dad had bot him to foller me on his bisuckle."

"That's queer. Powhatan must be a long distance from here. What authority did you fancy he could have to bring you back?"

"Oh, I didn't know. I didn't want to be ketched anyway."

"Well, I hardly think there is much danger. You can cover ground pretty fast. That's an odd wheel you have. What make is it?"

"Dunno. I don't know much 'bout wheels anyway. Guess there ain't any name of the maker on it."

"It's built like a racer," said Merriwell, as he lifted the strange wheel and looked it over, "and yet it is different from anything I have ever seen. It is geared high, but you seemed to run it easy enough for all that. What is the gear?"

"Gear? What's that?"

"Don't you know?"

"Nope. Tell ye I ain't had it long. I've alwus wanted one, but dad was sot against it. Jimminy! but this is a dandy you've got!"

He was examining Frank's bicycle, which was one of the very best machines made, and had always been cared for as tenderly as if it were a fine horse.

"That must have cost a heap of money," said the stranger. "I like the looks of them handles beter'n mine. Mine make me stoop over so."

"This wheel," said Frank, growing more and more

interested as he continued to examine it, "was built for a racer. It is not a pleasure wheel, but it is a dandy!"

"It can go pretty good."

"Let me try it. We're going in the same direction. You ride my wheel a while, and let me have this. Are you all right so you can ride?"

"Yes, I judge I'm all right, though I bet my old shoulder will be lame to-morrer. Reckon my hat saved my head. I don't mind tryin' your bisuckle."

This being agreed upon, Frank mounted the stranger's wheel, while he sprang on Frank's, doing so with awkwardness that pronounced him unskillful.

They rode along together, Frank somewhat in advance.

"Jimminy!" cried the boy in brown. "This bisuckle is great. It don't bend a feller over so his back will break in two."

"These handlebars can be reversed," explained Merriwell, "so the rider can sit up straight. Why didn't you do that?"

"Didn't know how."

Frank was studying the wheel beneath him critically, and it did not take him long to decide that it was a wonder. For all that it was geared so high it ran quite as easy as his own machine, and it could be driven much faster.

"If I had this wheel I wouldn't do a thing but win any race I entered," thought Frank. "I wonder if it can be bought."

The more he thought about this the stronger became



his desire to possess the wonderful wheel. He could not bear to think of giving it up, and he began to feel a genuine attachment for it.

It seemed as if the wheel, like a thing of life, possessed intelligence and was in sympathy with its rider. It was like a fine horse that knows its master and seems to respond to all his desires.

"What will you take for this machine?" Frank suddenly asked.

"Take for it?" repeated the other lad, riding somewhat closer. "I won't sell it."

Frank's hopes sank.

"I like it," he said, "and I will give you a good price for it."

"Then were'd I be without any wheel at all?"

"Eh? Why—why, I'll trade you mine. What do you say to that?"

"I don't know."

"I'll tell you frankly," Merriwell said, "I like this wheel. It is not a wheel for pleasure, but it's speedy. Now, I've got money, and I will make it worth your while to trade with me."

If Frank had not been riding in advance he would have noted the look of surprise that came to the face of the stranger. That look was followed by one of craftiness.

The boy in brown had not expected that Merriwell would offer to pay a difference between the two bicycles. Instead of that, he had fancied Frank would ask something in exchange.

He had been pleased by the fine appearance of Mer-

riwell's machine, and still more pleased by the fact that he could sit up straight in the saddle and give his tired back a rest. Then, too, there seemed to be something much more easy about Merriwell's saddle.

But it was plain that Frank wanted the other wheel, and he was willing to pay a difference between the two.

"Oh, I dunno's I want to trade," said the stranger. "I guess I can go faster on that bisuckle."

He said this as if he did not feel sure about it.

"I believe he thinks he can run away from me on any machine," thought Frank. "It hasn't dawned on him that he has a wonder in this bicycle. If he knew more about wheels he would understand it."

For five or ten minutes more they rode along silently, and then Frank said:

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars, and I'll keep this wheel, while you may keep mine. That is a good offer."

It was a good offer, but it was a mistake. Frank should have asked the other boy to state what he would take. He would not have thought of asking that much, fearing it would be more than he could get, and his foxy little eyes opened wider than usual with surprise when he heard Merry's offer.

As soon as he could recover from his astonishment, the boy in brown said:

"Nop, I wouldn't do it for that."

"Then say how much you will take," urged Frank.

"I don't want to."

"Why not?"

"I reckon I don't want to trade."

"All right. I don't blame you, for this is a fast wheel. I did not want to take an advantage of you, and that is why I offered you twenty-five."

Then Frank rode on in silence, far from satisfied.

The stranger was no less satisfied, for he began to fear that Merriwell would change his mind about paying as much as twenty-five dollars. At last he said:

"Tell ye what I'll do."

"All right."

"I don't want to let that wheel go, 'cause it's the first one I ever had, an' I traded the red colt for it, but——"

"But what?"

"If you want ter give me fifty dollars and this wheel for that one, why, it's a go."

Then he caught his breath, fearing he had overstepped the limit.

"It's a bargain!" said Frank Merriwell, promptly. "We'll stop right here and settle it. You shall have your money immediately."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

They stopped, and Frank lost no time in handing over the money.

"Now I want your receipt for this," he said, "and a statement that you took the money in exchange between the wheels."

"Oh, what's the good of that?" was the protest. "You've got the wheel and I've got the money. That settles it."

"Not much," came firmly from Frank. "You must give me a receipt."

"What if I won't?"

"Then you must give me the money back."

"What if I won't do that, either?"

"Then I will make you."

There was no mistaking Frank's meaning, and his firm stand quickly convinced the boy in brown that he was not fooling, so he agreed to sign a receipt.

"You make it out," he said, and Frank did so.

The stranger still hesitated, seeming reluctant to sign it. He read it over and over, spelling out the most of the words.

"Is there anything the matter with that?" asked Frank.

"No, I judge not. You read it."

So Frank read aloud:

"Received from Frank Merriwell the sum of fifty dollars (\$50.00) and one Traveler bicycle in exchange for my wheel, marked 'Flyer,' maker unknown.

(Signed)

"PHIL DERRY."

The boy in brown wrote the signature with considerable awkwardness, holding the paper on his knee.

"There," he said, "is that satisfactory?"

"That is all right," answered Frank, as he folded the paper and put it in his pocket. "This wheel belongs to me now."

"Yes," nodded Phil Derry, with a crafty twinkle in his eyes, "and this wheel belongs to me. That's right."

They mounted and rode onward. Derry had stuffed the money far down into his pocket, his manner convincing Frank that he believed he had made a great bargain.

"If this bicycle proves what I think it is, I have made the greatest trade of my life," mentally decided Merriwell.

He was eager to give the wheel a trial, and soon began to push ahead. To his surprise, Derry did not attempt to keep up, and Frank was not long in running away from him.

The bicycle was a "flyer" indeed, as Merry found it fairly skimmed over the ground with the speed of the wind. And it did not require more muscle or skill to send it along than was necessary to propel the best made wheels of much lower gear.

Frank felt that the manufacturer of the wheel, who-

ever he was, had hit upon a discovery from which he should make a fortune.

Although, after fairly testing the bicycle, he slackened and rode at ordinary speed, he was not overtaken by the boy in brown, nor did he see anything more of Phil Derry during the ride to Forrest City.

Frank reached the latter place in advance of his companions, and sought the best hotel, at which he made arrangements for the accommodation of the party.

Merriwell secured a meal and was comfortably resting in the office of the hotel, reading a Memphis paper, when his friends rode up, straggling in one by one.

When Hodge appeared in the lead, Frank went out to greet them.

"Well," exclaimed Bart, "you must like to scorch over such roads as these! I am disgusted with riding in this section of the country—heartily so!"

As the others appeared, all expressed their feelings in language that could not be misunderstood.

Hans and Bruce were the last to arrive, and they came up slowly, both perspiring freely and looking supremely miserable.

"Oh, murder!" groaned Bruce. "I thought we struck some hard roads going West, but we never found anything like this. I am worn out with riding over bumps and hollows and pushing through marshes. I agreed to ride across the continent from New York to San Francisco, but I didn't agree to push a wheel coming back, and right now I give notice that I quit. You fellows may call it sport, but——"

"Sbort!" squawked Hans Dunnerwust. "Who



peen fool enough to call him dot? Shown me to him! I vant to seen him! Ef dot peen der kindt uf sbort dese barty is oudt to found, oxcuse me! I liked to saw vood a great deal petter. Yaw!"

Frank laughed heartily.

"I will confess the roads are somewhat worse than I expected," he said.

"Worse!" growled Browning. "Why, they are the worst ever made! And the country—all woods and swamp! It's a wonder if we don't all get the ague from riding through such a section. I could smell malaria in the very air."

"Yaw!" shouted Hans; "I could smelled dot, too!"

"The rest of you fellows may wheel to Memphis, if you like; I am going by rail."

"Yaw; you may rode me on a rail to Memvis, or any odder old blaces, but I don'd rode mein picycles."

"I am going to take a car."

"I vas goin' to took a whole railroadt drain!"

"Well, you are at liberty to do so," smiled Frank; "and I rather fancy I shall travel by rail myself. I had a curiosity to see this part of the country, expecting to find the negroes working on the cotton plantations. I have seen enough of it to satisfy me. There are more forests than cotton plantations, and the negroes do not seem to be working to any great extent at this time of year. Somehow, all the poetry that I fancied I should find in the ride is missing, and, as there is nothing depending, making no particular reason why we should stick to it, I am willing to give it up any time."

The others, as well as Bruce and Hans, were delighted to hear this, and straightway it was decided to travel on to Memphis by rail.

Then Frank asked them if they had seen the boy in brown on the road, but Phil Derry had not been seen by any of them.

"That is rather singular," commented Merriwell. "I do not believe he has come into this place."

"He must have come here or we should have seen him," said Diamond.

"I don't know about that. He acted rather peculiar. I should not have been able to overtake him if he hadn't been thrown from his wheel."

"What's that?" shouted Rattleton. "Wouldn't have been able to overtake him—you? Wheejiz! Do you expect us to believe you struck some fellow who could run away from you on a wheel?"

"That's what I struck," admitted Frank, amused by Harry's excitement.

"Lot on your nife—I mean not on your life! You can't make me believe that! What sort of a jolly are you giving us?"

"It is no jolly, fellows. I did my best to overtake him, and four times he ran away with ease. Even then I should not have caught him, but he was thrown from his bicycle and stunned."

"Wal, he must be a dandy!" said Ephraim Gallup.

"Faith! Oi'd loike to put me two oies on th' chap!" cried Barney Mulloy.

"I'd rudder see dat boy dan a circus, chilluns!" de-

clared Toots. "He must hab chain-lightnin' in his legs—yes, sar!"

"There was nothing at all wonderful about him," assured Frank. "He was a new rider, and was in an ordinary brown suit of clothes."

"A new rider?" came from Diamond. "Look here, Merriwell, I will confess that I do not understand when you are joking and when you are not. This may be a joke. You say I do not appreciate any joke, and I'll be hanged if I appreciate this!"

"It is no joke; it is the sober truth."

"Pwhat do yez mane by sayin' th' b'y in brown wur a new roider, Frankie?" asked Barney, curiously.

"Just that."

"A granehorn?"

"Yes."

"Not used to roidin'?"

"Exactly."

"An' he could roon away frum yez?"

"He did."

"Then it's th' Ould Nick he must have bin, or his whale wur run by ilictricity!"

Frank laughed again, and confessed:

"Well, fellows, it was his wheel that did it."

Then there was a stir.

"But your wheel is the best in the market!" cried Hodge.

"With the exception of mine, it is the best," admitted Diamond; "and no greenhorn can run away from Frank Merriwell on my wheel."

"What wheel did he have?" grunted Bruce, who

was no less astonished than the others. "What was the make?"

"I never heard of the wheel before," said Frank. "It was simply marked 'Flyer,' and I do not know who manufactures it. It could fly, too."

"Well, I'd like to take a look at that wonderful wheel," said Hodge.

"Thot's phwat Oi'd loike ter do mesilf," cried Barney.

"Yaw!" nodded Hans, emphatically; "I vould done dot uf I got a chance."

"I'd a sight ruther see it than ther biggest squash that ever was showed at a caounty fair," declared Ephraim.

And the others expressed themselves in a similar manner.

"Well," smiled Frank, "I think you'll be able to see it. It is here in this hotel."

"Here?" exploded the excitable Diamond. "How does that happen?"

"I thought you said the boy in brown did not come into town," Rattleton cried.

"I did say so," nodded Frank.

"Then how——"

"I have the wheel he was riding. We traded."

"Traded?"

"Yes. I gave him fifty dollars between them."

"Fifty dollars!" gasped Rattleton. "And yours was a high-grade wheel! Frank, you must be groolish or fazy—I mean foolish or crazy!"

"I was neither. With that wheel I expect to win in

any race I may enter. I believe I have made the best trade of my life."

"By gum!" grinned Ephraim. "He won't do a thing to the other chaps in the races at Memphis. The Southern Wheelmen will find they have struck a hot baby from the North."

"If I race on that wheel and win, I shall feel that I am indebted to the South for it," said Frank; "for didn't I find the wheel here in the South? Perhaps it was made down here somewhere. Come on, fellows, if you want to take a look at it."

They followed him, and he led the way into the room set apart for trunks and baggage, Toots alone being left outside to stand guard over their wheels.

"There!" cried Frank, pointing to a wheel that stood against the partition; "take a look at it! There it is!"

The boys gathered around it, staring at it in curiosity. Hodge was the first to utter an exclamation:

"Why!" he cried; "I thought you said you did not know the maker of this machine? Everybody knows this machine!"

"Eh?" gasped Frank. "Everybody? Well, they lay over me! I never saw it before—or one like it."

"Why, yes you have! Rattleton rides one exactly like it, and he has the heaviest-running wheel in the combine!"

"Rattleton? Get out! Why, his wheel is——"

"A Blizzard, and this is a Blizzard."

"Blizzard? Why, get away and let me see! It's marked 'Flyer!' What's this mean, anyhow?"

Frank had quickly pushed forward and was examining the bicycle.

"This is not my wheel!" he cried. "This is not the bicycle I traded for! Where is my machine? Boys, it is not here—it's gone! Gone—and this thing has been left in its place!"



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### WHO WAS THE THIEF?

For once in his life, Frank Merriwell showed unusual excitement. He would not have been thus aroused had his life been in deadly peril.

"Somebody has stolen my bicycle, and left this other one in the place of it!" he cried. "But I'll have that bicycle back if it costs me ten thousand dollars and a year of my time!"

He was in earnest, and his unusual excitement aroused his companions thoroughly. When Frank appeared like that, something was wrong.

Frank felt that he had been robbed of something very dear to him. In the short time that it had been in his possession, Frank had learned to treasure his new wheel beyond price.

It was gone, and with it had vanished all his hopes of astonishing the Association of Southern Wheelmen, whose "Grand Meet" was to be held in Memphis two days later.

Vanished—no! The thief should not get away! He would pursue the scoundrel.

Pursue him! He might do that, but it was pretty certain he would not overtake him, in case the thief was a skillful rider. Mounted on the Flyer, the thief could get away with ease.

Frank thought of this, but he would not give up.

The thief would not be able to ride faster than electricity could carry a message. The telegraph should cut him off.

Merry dashed into the office and called for the clerk. A sleepy boy said the clerk was around somewhere. Frank shook the boy smartly to awaken him, thrust a quarter into his hand and told him to find the clerk in a hurry.

In a short time the boy appeared, and the clerk wearily followed him, looking pale and thin and hollow-eyed, as if he had just recovered from a severe attack of "shakes."

"My bicycle," said Frank, swiftly but distinctly—"it is gone!"

"Really, suh," said the clerk, with apathetic interest, "you don't say so, suh?"

"But I do!" cried Frank. "It has been taken from the baggage-room of this hotel since I left it there."

"Really, suh," murmured the clerk, "you astonish me, suh."

"I shall hold this house responsible for that wheel if it is not recovered," said Frank.

"Really, suh," said the clerk, "we decline all responsibility, suh."

"But it was taken from the baggage-room of this hotel—taken since I arrived here. Another wheel was left in its place. Some other person must have been here since I came."

"Yes, suh," acquiesced the clerk; "there was a young gentleman heah while you were at youah dinner, suh."

"He rode a wheel?"

"Yes, suh."

"And went away on a wheel?"

"Yes, suh."

"He's the fellow I'm after! He's got my bicycle. What did he look like?"

"He was dressed in brown clothes, suh, and——"

"The boy in brown!" shouted Frank. "Phil Derry! He has stolen the wheel! He keeps my fifty dollars, but tries to get the wheel back! Which way did he go? Do you know?"

"He asked about the road toward Blackfish, suh."

"Blackfish—that's east on the railroad?"

"Yes, suh."

"How far?"

"Twelve miles, I judge."

"Perhaps he hasn't gone through Blackfish yet," palpitated Frank. "I'll wire to have him stopped there. He won't get away with my bicycle! I'll have that wheel back! Where's the telegraph office—quick?"

The clerk was bewildered with such excitement and vehemence. He was not accustomed to it. Slowly and with exasperating lassitude, he gave directions for finding the telegraph office. Then he stared as he saw Frank, with a brief expression of thanks, rush away, fly out of the door and go speeding like a deer along the street.

Frank found the telegraph office, bounded in, awakened the sleepy operator, grabbed a pad, scribbled a message, tore off the sheet, thrust it at the staring telegrapher.

"Here!" he exploded, "send that—instantly! Greatest importance! Must go right away. Excuse my haste, but you'll understand when you read it."

The operator took the message and glanced languidly over it, as if there was no reason in the world why he should hurry. He read it aloud:

"To Sheriff or Constable, Blackfish, Ark.: Stop and hold boy in brown, riding bicycle marked 'Flyer,' and coming from Forrest City. Bicycle stolen. Will be there in one hour.  
FRANK MERRIWELL."

"Sixty cents, please," said the operator.

Frank paid, and then he urged the operator to send it at once, so the thief would not get through Blackfish before the message arrived. When he saw the young man at the instrument he departed.

Frank hurried back to the hotel. The boys were waiting for him. They knew he would return in a hurry.

"Who's with me?" he cried. "I'm off for Blackfish to see if I can't recover my wheel. Have sent a message to officer there."

Browning groaned in an agony of spirit, and Hans nearly fainted.

"Why, we haven't had time to rest at all!" gasped the big fellow.

"Shimminy Gristmas!" gurgled the Dutch boy. "Uf dese don'd peen der death uf me, I don'd know mineself!"

The others were ready enough to start.

Frank ran into the hotel, settled his bill, secured the wheel the thief had left, and came hustling out.

"Come on!" he cried. "All who are ready to help me run down the rascal follow!"

Then there was a hasty mounting of bicycles, and away the party dashed, strung out in a long line.

Hans was the last to start, and he made a ludicrous spectacle as he pumped away in frantic pursuit of the others, muttering:

"Shimminy Gristmas! uf this don'd peen der death uf me, I peen tougher than dot Guthrie shack rabbits! Yaw!"

Frank did not wait for the others, but he soon found he was not mounted on a first-class wheel, and he had not gone three miles before the pace and the hot sun began to tell on him.

"Oh, if I had my original wheel!" he muttered. "Then I'd be able to stand this!"

Then it was that a new thought flashed through his mind, giving him a great shock.

If it was Phil Derry who had stolen his Flyer then he must be mounted on the wheel which he had traded with Derry!

This wheel was a Blizzard, and he had never owned a Blizzard in his life!

In the excitement during the effort to find out what had become of his Flyer he had not thought of that. It added another element of mystery to the case.

If not Phil Derry, who had taken his wheel? and why was it stolen?

The Blizzard he was riding made a far better ap-

pearance than Frank's new wheel, and it was not at all likely that an ordinary rider would think of getting a better wheel by changing without making an investigation.

Was it possible Phil Derry had exchanged the wheel he obtained from Frank for a Blizzard during the short time since the trade in the forest, and then found an opportunity to change again for the Flyer?

By the time Frank had ridden five miles he could understand why a stranger might wish to exchange the Blizzard he bestrode for another bicycle, even though the other bicycle did not look as well to the eye of the casual observer.

The bicycle he was riding ran hard and was "cranky." It was as full of tricks as a bucking broncho, and twice was Frank thrown to the ground. Fortunately, he was not seriously hurt, although the second fall lamed him somewhat.

Browning, despite his natural laziness, was a splendid rider. Next to Hans, he had started last, but as he warmed up he forged by the others, and, before five miles had been covered, was riding with Frank.

At Frank's second fall, Bruce shot ahead, Merriwell crying:

"Go on! go on! Catch the thief! I'm all right!"

Browning understood, and so he became the leader in the race.

Frank mounted quickly and hurried after Browning, who vanished from view in the gloomy forest.

Within ten minutes he came upon Bruce and a



stranger, the latter being a youth of eighteen or nineteen.

Beside the road lay two bicycles. In the middle of the road were the big college lad and the other fellow. Bruce had the other by the collar, and was shaking him as a terrier might shake a rat.

"Try to steal a wheel of this party, will you!" Browning growled, much as an angry dog might. "Why, confound you! I have a mind to shake you out of your skin!"

One glance Frank took at the stranger.

It was not Phil Derry!

The stranger wore a brown bicycle suit, much like the one Frank had on. He was trying to say something, the shaking he was receiving causing him to chatter out the words.

"Hold on a mum-mum-mum-minute. I cuc-cuc cuc-can expup-pup-plain it all! I tut-tut-took the wheel by mum-mum-mum—good gracious! stop—by mum-mum-mistake! Oh, my goodness! Ow! I've bitten my tongue!"

"Oh, this is solid satisfaction for me!" grunted Bruce, as he continued to shake. "Made me get all covered with perspiration chasing you, eh? Made me exert myself and pant and swear and eat dirt and endanger my life riding over these infernal roads! Haw! I'm not half through with you yet!"

"If you'd lul-lul-let mum-mum-me explain! Wait! I cuc-cuc-cuc-can satisfy you."

"Oh, a chap that'll steal a bicycle can lie."

"Bub-bub-but I won't lie—there's no reason fuf-fuf-for it."

But Browning was so incensed that he would not have stopped for some time had not Frank interfered.

Jumping quickly from the bicycle, Merriwell caught hold of the stranger and pulled him from Browning's grasp with surprising promptness and ease, sharply crying:

"Won't you let him speak for himself, Bruce? Let's hear what he has to say."

"Thank you!" murmured the strange lad, still gasping for breath, as he pulled himself together. "That fellow is a perfect bear! He's strong as a giant, and I didn't have a show."

He was a rather good-looking chap, with a face that struck Frank as being honest. His eyes were blue and steady, with no shifty light in them or sign of craft.

"What's the use to listen to him?" growled Browning. "Of course he'll lie about it."

The stranger had been pale as if frightened, but now he flushed. Drawing himself up, he cried:

"No Welling ever told a lie, suh!"

"Haw!" grunted Bruce.

For all that he had received such a shaking, the stranger seemed inclined to fly at the big fellow, but held himself in check. The insinuation that he would lie seemed to start his temper even more than it had been aroused by the rough handling given him by Browning.

"It was my wheel he took, Bruce," said Frank,

calmly. "If I am willing to listen to his explanation, you should not say anything."

"Oh, all right!" came wearily from Browning. "I have nothing more to say! Go ahead!"

"Now," said Frank, as he released the strange lad, "I am willing to hear any explanation you want to make."

The others were coming up, one by one, dismounting as they arrived, and gathering about Frank and the unknown.

"My explanation is that I took your wheel by accident, sir," said the other, looking Frank squarely in the eyes. "That may seem remarkable, but it is true. I stopped at Forrest City, leaving my bicycle in the hotel while I went out to send a dispatch to my sister, telling her when I would be home. When I came back, I took the wrong wheel. That's all there is to it."

"Haw!" grunted Browning, contemptuously.

Frank was thoughtful. He studied the face of the strange lad.

"It seems to me he is telling the truth," was his thought. Aloud, he said:

"It is rather remarkable that you should not have discovered the difference in the wheels till you had ridden so far."

"It is," agreed the strange lad; "but I did discover it finally, and I was riding back to Forrest City when I met this big chap, who stopped me, yanked me off my wheel, and shook me up generally."

"You were coming back?" exclaimed Frank, catching at the words.

"Yes, suh."

"Is this right, Bruce?"

"Well," said Browning, reluctantly, "he was riding toward Forrest City when we met."

"I wondered that my wheel ran so smooth," said the stranger. "But you know wheels have whims, or seem to, and sometimes they will go along nicely on an ordinary road, while at other times they will pump hard on a good road without any apparent reason. My wheel is full of such freaks, and, when I noticed how nice it was running, I thought at first that it was in an unusually good humor. It was only when I set out to make a spurt that I was astonished and began to look it over to see why it was going twice as fast as it ever did before. Then I found it was not my wheel. Immediately I turned around and started to ride back to Forrest City."

This was told in a manner that convinced Frank the stranger spoke the truth, remarkable though it was that he had not made the discovery before.

"I believe you," said Frank, holding out his hand, "and I am sorry Browning gave you such a shaking."

The face of the strange lad lighted up, and he smiled in a most pleasant manner.

"Thank you!" he cried, grasping Frank's hand. "A fellow feels powerful mean when he finds he has made such a break, and it is a clean knockout when he finds himself regarded as a thief and a liar. I was hurrying to get back to Forrest City, for I knew I could

straighten it out all right if I brought the bicycle right back."

"Well, don't let it worry you any more. Where do you belong?"

"In Memphis. My name is Charlie Welling, and my father, Judge Welling, is known everywhere in this part of the country. He is one of the directors of the Bank of Commerce and a member of the Tennessee Club. I can give you any sort of references you may desire."

"I do not desire any, Mr. Welling, and I regret very much this unpleasantness. My name is Frank Merriwell."

"Eh? Frank Merriwell? Not the Yale Frank Merriwell I have read so much about in the papers?"

"Yes," said Frank, smiling and blushing at bit, "the same."

With an exclamation of delight, Charlie Welling grasped Frank's hand once more.

"By Jove! this is the greatest pleasure of my life, suh!" he cried. "I never expected to meet you, Mr. Merriwell. Why, I wouldn't have missed this for a hundred shakings such as I received."

He was in earnest; all could see that. His hearty admiration of the great all-around athlete of Yale was breezy and refreshing while it was natural.

Then Frank introduced him to the other lads and he shook hands with them all, Toots excepted. The last to come forward was Bruce Browning, looking supremely disgusted with himself.

"Mr. Welling," he drawled, "you're all right. I

think, and I made a mistake. I apologize, but you understand I——”

That was quite enough to soften Charlie Welling toward the giant with the strength of a grizzly bear.

“Don’t say another word, suh!” he cried. “I can understand how you felt about it. You thought you had caught a thief, and you were giving him what he deserved. Don’t say another word, Mr. Browning, suh!”

Then all fell to joking over the adventure which had terminated so pleasantly.

They learned that Charlie Welling was a member of the principal cycling club of Memphis, besides belonging to the Southern Wheelmen’s Alliance and the L. A. W.

He learned they were going to Memphis to attend the big bicycle meet, and he immediately promised them the hospitality of the Memphis Cycle Club when they arrived.

Then they turned about, and, mounting their wheels, rode along together toward Blackfish.



## CHAPTER XXV.

### AN OFFICER'S MISTAKE.

Frank felt so good to get on his Flyer once more that he challenged them to follow him into Blackfish, having done which, he proceeded to run away from them in a hurry, successfully demonstrating all the superior points he had claimed for his bicycle.

Merriwell rode into the little hamlet of Blackfish, which was nothing but a station on the L. R. and M. railroad having a collection of three or four houses.

A horseman met Merriwell and blocked the road.

"Hold on, you, suh!" he cried, commandingly.

Frank did not stop.

"Give me my share of the road, that's all I ask," he cried, having had some unpleasant experiences with Arkansas squatters, not a few of whom seemed prejudiced against all wheelmen.

"Hold on, you, suh!" repeated the man on the horse. "I want you!"

"Well, I am going to the station. You will be able to find me there," said Frank, who did not relish the idea of dismounting for every squatter who took a fancy to order him to do so.

"Yo'll stop right now, suh!" harshly cried the man, as he produced a pistol and pointed it at Frank. "If yo' don't a bullet will stop yeh!"

Frank stopped and dismounted.

"What is the matter with you?" he angrily exclaimed. "What do you mean by pulling a pistol on me?"

"I mean that yo' are under arrest, suh!"

"Arrest?" gasped Frank, utterly astounded.

"Yes, suh," nodded the lank squatter, rolling a huge chew of tobacco over his tongue; "jest that, suh. And now yo'll march along in front of me, suh, with that bisuckle. I'm an officer, and yo' are caught."

"But what is the charge against me? Why am I arrested?"

"For stealin' that bisuckle, suh," said the man on the horse, grimly. "I've got your description, an' yo' are the one. March!"

Frank marched. He knew it would not do to fool with an Arkansas squatter who fancied he was dealing with a criminal and had the law on his side.

But Frank was indignant.

"Look here, confound you!" he said. "I can prove that this wheel belongs to me. Just give me a show."

"March!" commanded the man on the horse.

"Say, you're making a blithering fool of yourself! What's the use? Why don't you give me a chance to explain?"

"March!"

So Frank trudged along, trundling the wheel. As he did so, a new thought came to him, and he broke into laughter, much to the surprise of his captor.

"Say," called the boy, over his shoulder, "are you a constable?"

"Yes, suh."

"I thought so. You received a message a short time ago from a fellow who signed himself Frank Merriwell?"

"Yes, suh."

"He told you to capture a boy in brown, who had stolen a bicycle?"

"Yes, suh; an' yo' are the boy."

"Ha! ha! ha!" rang out Frank's clear laughter. "Oh, my! What a joke? The fellows will guy me to death over it! Ha! ha! ha!"

The boy's laugh seemed to indicate that he was really heartily amused, and the man on the horse grew uneasy, for it was very strange that a captured thief should laugh in that way.

"Stop yo' laffin'," he commanded.

"How can I?" cried Frank. "Ha! ha! ha! Really, this is too funny for anything!"

"Yo' won't think it funny, suh, when I am done with yo'."

Frank continued to be merry, permitting the man to march him up to the little railway station. The station agent was on the platform, waiting for them to approach. He was a small, thin youth.

"Waal, Bill," he said, "I see yo've got him."

"Yo' bet!" nodded the constable. "I caught the cuss, but he's mighty queer. He's been laffin' 'bout it an' callin' it a good joke. What yo' think of that, Lamson?"

"He's tryin' to bluff ye, Bill," declared the station agent, as he stepped from the platform and surveyed Frank at closer range. "He's dressed in brown—

that's all right." Then he took a look at the name on Frank's wheel. "And this is the bisuckle that was stolen, suah 'nuff. It's marked 'Flyer.' Yo' are all right, Bill."

"Gentlemen," laughed Frank, "the joke is on me—I acknowledge it."

"Then yo' own up yo' stole the bisuckle?" asked the constable, eagerly.

"Hardly. It belongs to me."

"That bluff won't go."

"I will prove it to you. I am Frank Merriwell, who sent the message to you."

At this both the constable and the station agent looked incredulous and shook their heads, grinning.

"I will prove it," said Frank, with confidence. "Look here, I can repeat that message word for word."

He proceeded to do so.

"There," he said, "if I did not send that message, how could I repeat it?"

Both men looked puzzled, but it was plain they were not convinced.

"Oh, yo' found out somehow that it was sent," said the constable.

"How could I find out? There is no telegraph station between here and Forrest City. If I stole the wheel I was on my way here when that message was sent, and there was no possible way for me to know about it."

The listeners looked puzzled, and Frank continued:

"The whole thing is plain enough. I will tell you how it happened. The fellow who took my wheel

wears a brown suit. He took it by accident, leaving a wheel of his own behind. With my friends, I pursued and met him on the road. He was returning to restore the wheel to me, having discovered his mistake. So it came about that I got my wheel back without much trouble. Are you satisfied?"

The constable looked at the station agent, and the station agent looked at the constable. Their faces wore a blank expression. At last, the constable said:

"No, suh, I'm not satisfied, suh! If yo' are tellin' the truth, I'm not satisfied. I have been put to consid'ble trouble, an' I must have my pay fo' it, suh. But I am not satisfied that yo' are not the thief."

"Then I will try to satisfy you by absolute proof. The message was signed Frank Merriwell. Look here, sir—here are my letters, such as I have seen fit to carry in my pockets, all addressed to Frank Merriwell. That should be enough."

He handed over several letters to the constable.

"More than that," he added, quickly stripping off his bicycle coat and showing the inside of his collar, "here is my name marked on this garment. But that is not all, for, in a very short time a party of friends will arrive, all of whom can vouch for me."

With this statement, Frank calmly sat down on the platform, seeming to enjoy the perplexity of the two men.

The constable passed back Frank's letters, then motioned with his hand for the station agent to step aside with him. They put their heads together and con-

versed in low tones, the officer keeping his pistol ready for use and watching Frank all the while.

Before this consultation was over, Diamond and Hodge came into sight and rode toward the station. Before they arrived, others of the party were seen coming.

"By Jove! Merry," cried Hodge; "that wheel is all you claim for it. We did our best to keep in sight of you, but you walked away from us easily."

"That's right, Merriwell," nodded the Virginian; "and you did not seem to be working so very hard, either. You have a wonder in that wheel. But what's the matter, anyhow?"

As the others came up, Frank drew his face down and looked very sad and dejected, even though he was laughing inwardly.

"I'm arrested," he explained.

Hodge and Diamond staggered, having dismounted from their wheels.

"Arrested?" gasped Bart.

"Arrested?" shouted Jack.

Frank nodded dolefully.

"Yes," he said, "arrested at the mouth of a pistol."

"For what?" palpitated Hodge.

"By whom?" fluttered Diamond.

"You are horsing us!" they both declared in chorus.

"No," murmured Frank, slowly shaking his head and jerking his thumb over his shoulder. "The man with the whiskers and boots arrested me. He's an officer."

"He's a chump!" exploded Hodge, angrily.



"What is the charge against you?" asked Jack.

"Stealing."

"Stealing what?"

"My own bicycle."

"Well, hang him!"

The others were coming up. Now that the excitement was over Browning had lost all his energy, and he was dragging along behind them all, looking wretched and forlorn.

There was great excitement when the boys understood what had happened. At first they were inclined to regard the matter seriously, but Rattleton detected a twinkle in the corners of Merriwell's eyes, and he cried:

"Fellows, this is a jowling hoke—I mean a howling joke! I don't believe Merry is arrested at all! He's put up a job on us."

It was no easy matter to convince Harry that this was not true, but Frank protested that he actually was under arrest for stealing his own bicycle.

Then the boys began to see the ludicrous side of the affair, and they shouted with laughter.

That made the constable angry.

"Laff!" he cried. "Somebody will pay me for my trouble. I was instructed to arrest a boy in brown, ridin' a 'Flyer' wheel, an' I done it. Now, somebody has got to fork over before I let him go."

That aroused Browning once more. The big fellow had dismounted from his wheel and was wiping his perspiring face with a handkerchief. Into his

pocket went the handkerchief. Up to the constable he heavily stalked.

"See here," he said, "if you know what is real healthy for you, you will chase yourself. I am not feeling very good-natured myself, and I'd really enjoy having a little scrap with you. Put up that gun!"

The constable hesitated.

"Put up that gun!"

Bruce looked him straight in the eyes. There was something about the big fellow that caused the constable to obey.

"Who's goin' to pay me fo' my time?" he half whimpered.

"Your time must be valuable!" contemptuously returned Bruce. "You may charge the bill to the county."

"The county won't pay it, suh, an' I'll never git anything fo' my trouble. I ain't even got enuff ter get a plug of twist, an' I'm all out."

Frank pitied the squatter.

"Here," he said, "I caused you all this trouble, and I'll pay you a dollar for it. Is that satisfactory?"

The squatter brightened up, saying:

"Suh, that is puffedly satisfactory, suh. I see now that I made a mistake with yo', an' I judged all along that yo' looked too much like a gentleman, suh, to be a thief."

Thus it was settled.

The boys learned when the next eastbound train would be along, and found they had an hour to wait.

They spent that hour in the shelter of the station, where they could escape from the hot sun.

The next train was flagged and the boys got aboard. Their wheels were taken into the baggage car, for all railroads in Arkansas carry bicycles free as regular baggage.

It was a jolly party that bade the station agent and the constable farewell, waving their hands and handkerchiefs at him. The negroes who had gathered at the station on the approach of the train stared in astonishment.

"Waal, said Bill Jennings, the constable, when the train had disappeared, "I got a dollar out of it anyway, though I knowed that feller wasn't a thief the minute I looked at him. I kin tell a thief by the looks of him—even a black chicken thief."

He looked straight at one of the negroes as he made this observation, and the darky gave a start, quickly turning and walking away.

"Hit him that shot!" muttered Bill, as he went into the station and stretched himself on a settee for a nap, leaving his thin old horse outside in the shade.

For nearly two hours Bill slept and snored. He was aroused by being fiercely shaken.

"Wh—what's the matter?" he asked, in a dazed way.

The excited station agent was bending over him.

"Look here, Bill!" shouted the station agent, "yo' are a blame fool!"

"Hey?" said the constable, sitting bolt upright. "Who says so, suh?"

"I say so, suh!"

"Waal, suh, why should yo' say so, suh?"

"Because yo' let that bisuckle thief go."

"Let him go? Why, he——"

"He stole that bisuckle! I know it now!"

"How do yo' know it?"

"I just listened to a message that went through the office, calling for his arrest if he appears in Memphis. That wheel, marked Flyer, was stolen from a chap by the name of Mortimer Swett. It's the only one of the kind in existence. The feller that yo' arrested was the thief."

"Waal," said Jennings, "darn if I didn't think so all the time, though he did look so slick. He had the 'pearance of a thief."

"Waal, you jest missed a haul, Bill, for Mortimer Swett offers a hundred dollars reward for the arrest of the thief an' recovery of the bisuckle."

"Suh," said Bill, in supreme self-contempt, "will it be too much trouble fo' yo' to kick me as hard as yo' can?"

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### AN ADVENTURE IN MEMPHIS.

**"Memphis Memphis!"**

The boys had crossed the Mississippi and reached the city that stood on the bluffs that lined the eastern shore. The train was drawing into the station.

"Wal, if I ain't glad to git aout of Arkansaw!" said Ephraim Gallup. "Parts of that State is all right, but near the river it's so bad I wisht I was to hum on the farm."

"Hurrah!" burst forth Rattleton, as the train came to a stop. "Here we are, fellows!"

"And I am home again!" exclaimed Charlie Well-ing, who had accompanied them. "It is good to get home."

"Yaw, I pelief me," nodded Hans; "but I peen a long dime away from dot."

The boys hurriedly left the car for the station platform, laughing and joking. It was a jolly crowd, and they attracted considerable attention.

"It's a cycle club come to the meet," commented the spectators. "They 'a' got a nigger along to look out for their wheels."

As the boys were looking over the wheels that were taken from the baggage car, each selecting his machine when it came off, two men in civilian garb stood near, watching them closely.

Frank was speaking to Charlie when the Flyer was removed from the car, so he did not claim it at once. Charlie had invited him to call at his home.

The two men looked sharply at Frank's wheel and then exchanged significant glances, each having seen the name.

Frank had his check in his hand. The baggage man had been removing the checks as fast as he received the wheels, for each owner stood ready to claim his machine. In this instance he did the same thing.

"Number 3117—whose bicycle is this?" he called.

Frank thrust the check into his hand, saying:

"I will take that."

In a moment the two men were on either side of Merriwell.

"Is that your wheel?" asked one.

Frank looked surprised.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

"Where did you get it?"

There was something about the question that aroused Merry's resentment. He did not like it.

"Sir," he said, "I don't think that is anything to you."

The hand of the man on his right fell on his shoulder.

"Oh-o!" exclaimed the owner of the hand.

The hand of the man on the left fell on Frank's other shoulder.

"Ah-a!" said the owner of the second hand.

"We want you," declared the first.

"And we have you," declared the other.

Frank was astonished.



"It is quite plain that you have me," he said; "but I wish you would explain what it means."

"You are arrested."

"What—again?" he gasped.

"Ah! You have been arrested before! An old offender, evidently."

"What is this for?"

"Stealing that bicycle."

"Well, this is getting a trifle monotonous!" exclaimed Frank. "You have the wrong chap."

But that did not go with the men. They showed their badges, and were about to drag Frank away without further ceremony, although Bruce and several of the party protested.

"That telegram of mine must have been forwarded here, and it is getting me into no end of trouble," thought Frank. "I don't fancy taking the trouble to explain everything to these men, and it will be something of a lark to give them the slip. Can I do it? I can try!"

The officers were replying to the protests of Frank's friends. They were not giving their undivided attention to Merriwell.

There was a snap, a whirl, a push and a blow, and the two men found themselves flat on the platform, having been tripped and thrown down in a most sudden and surprising manner.

A merry laugh rang out, and Frank was astride his wheel in a moment.

"Clear the road!"

Ding! ding! ding!—went his bell.

Along the platform he darted, turning here and there, avoiding the persons who were in his way.

"Stop him!" shouted one of the officers, struggling up.

"Stop him!" roared the other, also scrambling to his feet.

Then both started in pursuit.

There was excitement at the station. Instead of trying to stop the daring, laughing boy, those who saw him in time were so astonished that they stood still or made a scramble to get out of the way.

There was a flight of steps at the end of the platform. They would stop him! He would have to dismount in order to descend, and his pursuers would capture him easily.

"Look out—look out for the steps!" shouted more than one.

"What's the matter with the steps?" laughed Merriwell. "They are dead easy to ride!"

He did not stop for them! Down them he went at a leap! Surely he would be thrown senseless to the ground at the bottom. Surely his bicycle would be smashed and twisted out of shape.

"Look!" roared a stout man. "By all that's wonderful! I never saw anything like that before!"

"He's done it! he's done it!" shouted twenty voices.

There was a general rush for the steps.

Frank had ridden down safely, had reached the street, and was flying away, avoiding carriages and cars.

For a moment the two officers were so astounded

they could not shout for some one to stop him. Then they recovered and renewed the pursuit.

Frank looked back a moment as he flashed around the first corner. His eyes were dancing with excitement and he was laughing in his old-time reckless manner.

"Jove!" he exclaimed. "That was sport, after all! It was almost worth being taken for a thief to have the sport of dodging the officers in such a manner."

The blood of a boy still leaped in Frank's veins, for all of his varied and remarkable experiences in life. And what boy will not leave the finest fruit in an orchard if he may have it for the plucking and pilfer sour, worm-eaten fruit from a forbidden tree, just for the sport of being pursued by the angry owner?

Away Frank sped. Pursuit was useless. He was soon far from the station, having failed to heed the policemen who attempted to stop him for reckless riding.

At last he turned into a street upon which there were many people and teams. There were great stores, and many ladies were on the street.

All at once, there was a commotion. Men shouted, women and children ran and screamed.

"What's up?" said Frank, perplexed for a moment.

Then, along the street he saw a crowd of men and boys coming in pursuit of a dog with glaring eyes and froth dripping jaws.

"Mad dog! mad dog!" was the shout.

And fairly in the path of the rabid animal a pretty girl had stopped in terror!

Frank saw the girl was too frightened to make an effort to get out of the way, and she was directly in the path of the rabid dog which was snapping and snarling at everything.

The foremost among the crowd, a uniformed policeman, flourishing a revolver in his hand, was some distance behind the dog. None of them could intervene to protect the girl.

Straight toward her Frank drove his bicycle. He felt that he must do something to save her, but what that something was he had not the least idea.

The dog came on. He seemed to see the helpless girl there, and his eyes took on a fiercer gleam.

"Run! run! run!" screamed twenty voices, but none of those nearest the girl attempted to aid her.

Women shrieked with horror as they realized the frightful peril that threatened one of their sex. Men turned pale and trembled. One boy, mounted on a bicycle, acted.

Frank saw that he would be able to reach the girl a little in advance of the dog. But he was not armed! He did not carry a revolver. What could he do?

His brain, ever active in moments of greatest peril, was filled with many schemes. Of them all, one stood out clearly.

Between the dog and the girl he flashed—down from the wheel he sprang.

Frank seemed to touch the ground just as the dog leaped. He had dismounted on the side of the wheel opposite the rabid beast. He caught up the light wheel and held it between him and the dog.

The dog struck it, and then boy, bicycle and dog went down in the dirt of the street, rolling over together.

There was another chorus of wild shouts, and the policeman came panting to the spot, expecting to see the rabid animal tearing at the brave boy.

Instead of that, Frank had fastened his fingers on the throat of the dog and was holding him off with desperate strength. It seemed wonderful that he could do it.

"Let me shoot him! let me shoot him!" gasped the officer.

"Steady, you!" came from Frank, who realized that the excited officer might make a mistake and lodge a bullet where he had no intention of putting it. "Wait! I've got him! Get around sideways, or you'll shoot me!"

The astonished officer obeyed. What sort of youth was this who could clearly give directions in such a moment of peril?

"Now," ordered Frank, "be quick, but make sure of your aim! Put the muzzle of the gun against his ear! I'll try to hold him steady!"

He made the supreme effort of his life, for he realized that never had he been in greater danger of a most horrible death. In some manner he succeeded in holding the dog steady a moment.

The policeman thrust the muzzle of the revolver up against the ear of the dog—and fired!

There was a sudden limpness of the rabid creature's

body, and a gasp of relief came from Frank Merriwell.

But he did not release his hold on the throat of the animal, for he knew that sometimes a bullet in the head of a dog does not complete its work. He held fast with all his strength.

"His heart next time!" he said, and his voice was wonderfully steady under the circumstances. "You've got a good chance! Shoot him through the heart!"

The policeman obeyed, but not till five bullets had been planted in the dog did Frank release his hold. Then, with an exclamation of mingled relief and disgust, he flung the carcass aside, arising from his knees to his feet.

The crowd cheered wildly and flocked about. On every side men were saying it was the bravest deed they had ever witnessed. Boys were regarding Frank with positive adoration. Here was a boy and a hero—such a hero as all boys dream of some time becoming.

Frank's first thought was of the girl he had saved. Men were asking him if he had been bitten—if he had not been scratched. He did not answer them. He asked for the girl.

They told him she had been taken into a drug store at the corner. He picked up his wheel and made his way through the crowd toward the store. The throng parted for him to pass, as they might part for some great man—some mighty general. They stared at him, but no one ventured to touch him.

Straight into the drug store Frank took his wheel. The girl was there in a little back office. She was



sitting on a chair, and one man was holding a bottle of smelling salts for her, while another was fanning her.

She saw Frank as he came in, and the sight of him did more than anything else to revive her.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "there he is—the brave fellow! Are you harmed? Tell me, did the dog bite you?"

"I think not," answered Frank, "but I fear you are injured."

"No, no—thanks to you, my brave, brave friend! How can I ever thank you! It was such a brave thing—such a noble thing! Oh, that dog—that dreadful dog! I could not run—I could not move when I saw him coming! I should have been killed! You saved me!"

"You cannot know how much pleasure it gives me to know I could do it," declared Frank, with all his natural chivalry. "I feared I should not reach you in time."

"But the dog was mad—the dog was mad!" cried one of the men. "Did you know that?"

"Of course I knew it."

"And you dared grapple with him barehanded! I never heard of such a thing! I don't believe such a thing was ever done before! And you are sure you were not scratched?"

Several of the men gathered about Frank. They made an examination to convince themselves that he had not been touched by the poison teeth of the dog.

There was not a mark on him.

"It was a most marvelous escape," asserted a man. "It could not be done again in ten thousand times. This young lady owes you her life."

The girl showed her gratitude. She recovered quickly. The store was cleared of the crowd by the policeman who had shot the dog, and another policeman stood guard at the door. The officer who did the shooting came and looked Frank over.

"Young man," he said, "you're a marvel! You'd make a dandy on the force! Why, you'd tackle a raging lion single-handed!"

Frank grew uneasy. He did not like all this adulation and admiration.

The girl whispered in his ear:

"I wish to speak with you elsewhere. Let's get out of here. Will you come?"

Now that he was satisfied that she was all right, he would have been pleased to leave her. Her thanks added to his uneasiness.

"I cannot leave my wheel," he said.

"Leave it here," said the druggist. "We will take care of it."

Then he whispered in Frank's ear:

"She is the daughter of one of the wealthiest men in Memphis. You have made a ten-strike, young man."

That made no difference to Frank. He would have risked his life for her just as quick if she had been the daughter of the poorest man in Memphis.

But he could not get away from her without being rude. She explained that she had left her carriage

across the street. She had been doing some shopping over there, and had started to cross to get something at the drug store. Then she sent a boy for the carriage.

It drew up at the door. And now Frank was uneasy indeed, for he saw that they must run the gantlet of the crowd outside. But the least he could do was to escort her to the carriage. This he proposed to do.

"You shall not leave me there," she said, and it was plain that she was a girl used to having her own way in everything. "You must enter the carriage with me. You can't refuse."

No, he could not. So they left the store, and he escorted her to the carriage, where a liveried footman stood holding the door open. Frank helped her in, and then got in with her. He felt that he was blushing furiously, for the crowd was staring in a most distressing manner.

The door slammed, the footman mounted to his place, the coachman cracked his whip, and away they went, while the crowd on the sidewalk broke into a wild cheer.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### CAUGHT AGAIN.

Straight to her home the girl took Frank Merriwell. On the way she learned that he was a stranger in Memphis, and that he had just arrived.

She lived in a grand house on the outskirts of the city. About the house were beautiful grounds, shaded by huge trees. There were flowers and fountains, and everything was of the magnificent order.

As they rolled up the gravel drive a boy was doing something with a bicycle at the door. The girl saw him and uttered an exclamation of delight.

"It's my brother!" she cried. "He is a bicycle crank, and he has been away on one of his runs. He was away longer than usual this time."

The boy heard the sound of wheels and turned about. Frank saw his face, and, in turn, uttered an exclamation.

"Charlie Welling!" he cried.

"You know him?" came from the astonished girl.

"Frank Merriwell!" almost shouted the boy with the bicycle. "Am I dreaming, or is it Frank Merriwell riding up here with my sister?"

"You are wide awake, old man," laughed Frank. "This seems to be a general surprise all around."

The carriage stopped, and Frank aided the girl to alight.

"Hanged if I can understand this!" came blankly from Charlie.

"Oh, you dear boy!" exuberantly cried his sister, as she clasped her arms about his neck and kissed him. "This gentleman just saved me from the most horrible peril! He placed himself between me and a mad dog, and fought the animal single-handed! He is the bravest fellow in all the world!"

After a while Charlie learned all the particulars. When he understood what Frank had done, he shook his hand, exclaiming:

"Mr. Merriwell, you are a wonder! You saved the finest girl in Memphis, and now, while you stay here, you must make this place your home."

Frank protested that he must be with the boys, but Charlie said the boys could get along over one night without him.

"You cannot go away before to-morrow morning," he said. "Day after to-morrow comes the great meet. From what I know of you and your wheel, I am inclined to think you will be a winner in any race you may enter."

"You forget Cousin Mortimer," said the girl, whose name was Ellie. "You know he wrote that he was on his way from Chicago with a wonderful bicycle that would run away from any ordinary wheel with ease."

But Charlie was too absorbed in Frank Merriwell to heed her words.

Frank was taken into the house, where he was urged to make himself perfectly at home.

The mother of Charlie and Ellie was dead, and Mr. Welling, senior, was away, so it happened that the only person in the family to whom Frank was introduced was an old maid aunt.

Ellie's nerves had received a severe shock, as she discovered after reaching home, for she was quite exhausted and sought her room.

Charlie took Frank to a room, where Merry was able to get off his clothes and get into a tub, after which he put on a suit of undergarments provided by Welling, and came out looking and feeling fresh.

By that time dinner was ready.

Ellie was able to come down to dinner, and a rather jolly meal they made of it. Frank seemed at his best. His conversation was most entertaining, and the stories he told brought forth bursts of laughter.

After dinner Frank, Charlie and Ellie spent an hour in the large, airy parlor. The girl played several brilliant pieces on the piano, and Frank sang a song.

Then they went out upon the veranda, for the sun had set, and evening was coming on.

The hoarse tooting of boat whistles came from the distant river, and a hazy cloud of smoke was hanging over the city.

A bicyclist rode in at the gate and came up the drive.

"It's Harvy Bramble," said Charlie.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Ellie. "Is he coming here again. He has been here every evening since you went away. I am getting weary of his persistent attentions."

"But you must treat him well, sister," said Charlie,



quickly, "for you know father and his father are the greatest of friends, and father insists that Harvy be treated as a relative."

"Oh, I know!" she murmured; "but it is awfully tiresome."

The young man on the wheel saw them in the shadow of the vines and sprang down before them, leaving his wheel against the corner of the veranda.

"Good-evening, Miss Ellie," he cried, lifting his cap. "Good-evening, Charlie! Why, this is a surprise! Jove! I didn't know you were back."

"And you came over to entertain my sister. It was good of you, Harvy, to keep her from being lonely while I was away."

"Nothing of the sort, old fellow! It was a great pleasure. But I hear she met with a frightful adventure in town to-day, and I called to ask about her health. I scarcely expected to find her here on the veranda. How fortunate she was not bitten by that dog!"

He came up the steps.

"I should have been bitten—I should have been killed but for the brave act of this gentleman here," said Ellie. "He placed himself between me and the dog, and fought the beast barehanded."

"Brave indeed!" cried Harvy Bramble, and Frank fancied he detected a hateful, sarcastic sneer in the voice.

"Permit me to introduce you," said Charlie. "Mr. Bramble, this is Mr. Merriwell, the gentleman who saved my sister."

Frank arose. He would have offered his hand, but Harvy Bramble bowed formally, stiffly saying:

"Mr. Merriwell, I congratulate you, suh. It is not often that one finds an opportunity to protect from harm such a charming girl as Miss Welling."

Frank made a reply, in his easiest vein, and then they sat down and talked. Harvy Bramble lighted a cigarette.

Frank soon found out that Bramble was a great sporting man, a bicycle enthusiast, but not much of a rider, and a most conceited chap.

"I have spotted the winners in the races," he declared, "and I am staking my dust on them. I am going to shove up every dollar I can get hold of, and I am bound to make a big thing out of the meet."

"You are a great sport, old man," said Charlie. "Who have you spotted for winners?"

"Well, I don't mind giving you a tip. Joe Hegner, of Little Rock, will win the road race. He is the greatest century rider in the South."

"And the one mile race on the track?"

"Mel White, of Louisville. He'll be here, and he is a great man on short runs. I have a roll on him already."

"The two-mile race—who will take that?"

"Bob Harris, of Memphis, if White does not carry off both."

"You say you are backing these men heavily?"

"Yes."

"Better go slow, old fellow. Mr. Merriwell will enter the track races, and he has a wheel that flies."

"Who ever heard of Mr. Merriwell as a bicyclist?" came with some derision from Harvy Bramble. "He may be fast, but he will keep out of the races, if he is sensible, for all the veterans will be against him."

"That will make it all the more interesting," laughed Frank.

"And you think you will stand a show?"

"I rather think so."

"Suh," said Harvy Bramble. "I am afraid your courage is better than your judgment."

Here Ellie spoke up, seeing the two were not in the best humor, although Frank was laughing lightly.

"Better be careful, Mr. Bramble," she said. "My cousin, Mortimer Swett, is coming on from Chicago, and he is bringing a remarkable new racing wheel, which he had made under his own directions. He says the wheel is a dead-sure winner."

"Ho!" said Bramble, from behind the glowing light of his cigarette, seen in the shadows, "that will not worry me. There will be other racing wheels quite as perfect on the ground, and none of the men I have named will get left."

Then he fell to talking about the meet with Charlie, and Ellie chatted with Frank. After a time Bramble arose and announced that he must go. He shook Charlie's hand, bowed very low to Ellie, and nodded stiffly to Frank, saying:

"Good-night, suh."

A few seconds later his wheel grated on the gravel of the drive, and his shadowy figure could be seen behind the lantern he had lighted.

Frank breathed easier when the fellow was gone. The atmosphere seemed to clear.

Ellie went into the house, but Frank and Charlie, languid from the reaction after their day of intense activity, lolled in the hammock and an easy-chair, still talking.

They spoke of various things, and, at length, the adventure at the station was mentioned.

"That was odd," laughed Frank. "It must be my telegram from Forrest City was forwarded in some way, and those officers attempted to arrest me for stealing my own wheel."

"Perhaps it would have been better if you hadn't dodged them," said Charlie.

"Oh, I don't know! It was fun, and that's what we are living for. I enjoy excitement."

"Then you have had quite enough of it since coming to Memphis."

It was a perfect Southern night. The moon had risen, and the stars were in the sky. Every gentle breeze brought the perfume of flowers.

Conversation lagged and stopped. Then one lad slept in the hammock, and one slept in the easy-chair.

Frank Merriwell was awakened by feeling heavy hands grasp him. He attempted to start up, but was held fast, and—click! click!—bands of iron encircled his wrists.

Then a triumphant voice exclaimed:

"We have him fast this time, and he will not get away again!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### OUT ON BAIL.

The two detectives who had attempted to arrest Frank at the railway station had traced him down and accomplished their feat at last.

A third person was with them.

It was Harvy Bramble.

He had brought them to the house of the Wellings, where Frank was stopping.

"I thought you would hardly fancy keeping a bicycle thief in your house overnight, Charlie," he said, as Welling, freshly awakened, began to understand what had taken place.

"But there is a mistake," protested Charlie. "He is no thief. The bicycle was stolen from him, and it is his own telegram that is causing him all this trouble."

Then Frank explained, but the officers laughed.

"We are not arresting you on that telegram at all. That wheel, marked 'Flyer,' was stolen from its inventor, and telegrams have been sent all over the country, instructing the police everywhere to look out for it."

"But—but I secured it in a legitimate trade!" protested Frank, for the first time beginning to understand the situation. "Listen—in my pocket here I have a receipt showing I paid fifty dollars as the dif-

ference between this wheel and the one I had in my possession this very morning."

"Receipt probably a forgery," gruffly answered one of the officers.

"But I can prove it by my eight companions."

"Where are they?"

"I don't know, but they are somewhere in Memphis. I lost them when I skipped you at the station."

"Too thin!" said one officer.

"Altogether too thin," agreed the other.

"He would not have run away if he was innocent."

"Surely not."

And so, despite Frank's protests, he was dragged away to be locked up.

"Saved Ellie's life, did he?" sneered Harvy Bramble to himself. "Well, he's not such a much! He won't cut much frost with her after this."

The officers had demanded the stolen wheel, but Frank told them he did not have it, and he refused to tell where it was. But Harvy Bramble knew where Merriwell had saved Ellie from the dog, and he volunteered to take them where they could secure the wheel.

Bramble took them straight to the drug store where the wheel had been left. But there, to the astonishment of Merriwell and the deep disgust of the detectives, they were informed that a youth in a bicycle suit who had been taken for Merriwell, had called for the wheel five minutes before, and it had been delivered to him.

Frank began to believe there was a hoodoo on the bicycle, for it seemed to bring the worst kind of luck



to anybody who possessed it. Now it had disappeared again, and it seemed very probable that it was in the hands of another thief.

Frank was carried to the lockup, and passed a rather unpleasant night in a cell. However, he was philosophical, and he took the situation as coolly as possible.

Surely fortune was playing fast and loose with him. Since entering Memphis he had been cheered as a great hero, and now he was under arrest as an ordinary thief.

All this had come about within a few short hours.

Morning came. It was ten o'clock before Frank was taken before the court.

The courtroom was crowded. Frank saw all his friends there, Bart, Bruce, Jack and the rest. They smiled and nodded encouragingly to him.

Charlie Welling was with them, and he was talking to a handsome, brown-bearded man. The latter regarded Frank with great interest.

Merry was guarded by two officers as he was brought in, but was not ironed. He walked proudly erect, and his face was that of one absolutely upright and honest. The brown-bearded man with Charlie Welling nodded in a satisfied manner as he saw that face fairly.

When Frank's name was called he stepped to the bar promptly. Newspaper reporters had found out that this was the boy who saved Richard Welling's daughter from the mad dog the night before, and they were on hand to obtain a new sensation. They watched Frank with great interest.

The charge against Merriwell was read, and Frank pleaded not guilty. Then the judge said it would be necessary to hold him for trial, and he would have to commit him. Bail was set at two thousand dollars.

Then came another surprise. The brown-bearded man with Charlie Welling immediately pushed forward and offered to be security for the prisoner.

The judge recognized him, bowed to him with the greatest respect, and accepted him as Frank's bondsman.

All this was soon arranged, and, within a short time, Merriwell was at liberty. A murmur of satisfaction ran over the courtroom. It grew louder and louder. The judge rapped sharply with his gavel. Still the murmur swelled. Then it burst into a cheer.

It was Charlie Welling's father who had become Frank's bondsman. He had returned home from a business trip earlier than he was expected, and it had not taken Charlie and Ellie long to interest him in Frank's case.

"Nothing can make either my son or my daughter believe you would steal a bicycle," he said, when Charlie introduced Frank to him; "and, from what I have seen of you, I think they are right."

Then he insisted that every one of the nine boys should make his home their home while they remained in Memphis.

"I have room for you all in the old house," he said; "and it will seem pleasant to have you there. Come."

They feared it would be too much of a sacrifice on

his part, and they said so; but he would not take no for an answer, and they went with him.

As Frank swung in the hammock on the veranda before noon that day, he said:

"I would feel first rate now if I knew what has become of that ill-fated wheel. Who carried it off? That is what I'd like to know. It must be recovered."

"Don't let that worry you," laughed Charlie. "Toots, bring Mr. Merriwell his Flyer."

And Toots did it!

Frank stared in astonishment, while the others laughed.

"Will somebody be good enough to explain!" cried Merry.

"That's easy," chuckled Charlie. "I knew where your friends were stopping last night, although I did not tell you so. As soon as the detectives took you away I resolved to save that wheel. I mounted my own bicycle, rode for all I was worth to your friends, and Mr. Rattleton went with me to the drug store, where he claimed and secured the wheel. We got away with it before the officers arrived."

For a little time Frank was delighted, and then he began to be worried. He feared he would not be able to enter the races with that wheel. It would be taken away from him.

"Don't enter but one," advised Diamond. "Let the rest of us have a shot at the others."

"That's right," nodded Hodge. "I want to get into the century road run with which the affair is to open."

"Go in," said Frank. "You may have it."

"And I'd like to try the mile race," said Diamond.  
 "All right."

"That leaves you the two-mile race, which will be the most exciting event of the second day."

"But I fear this bicycle will be taken from me."

"I tell you how we'll fix that!" cried Charlie Welling. "We'll keep it out of sight till the last minute, and we'll have another name on it. That plate can be taken off easily and another substituted."

This plan was agreed upon.

"Jove!" laughed Charlie. "Won't Bramble drop dead if you win that race! He is sure Harris will take it. He was in the courtroom when you were called up, but he did not know father meant to stand your bail. When father did so he was furious. He left the room, swearing bitterly, and rushed away to drown his dismay in drink."

"Does he drink much?"

"Sometimes, and he is a bad man when he has been drinking. He seems to lose his head entirely, and no act is too reckless for him to do."

The boys had a jolly time at the Welling mansion. They were given the utmost freedom about the place, and Charlie and Ellie did their best to entertain them. They lay about in the hammocks and easy-chairs, they sang, they played games, joked, laughed and were happy. Not even the charge hanging over Frank Merriwell's head seemed to disturb him greatly. He knew he was innocent, and so he knew that everything would come out right in the end.

Memphis filled with bicyclists. Every train poured

them into the city. The hotels were full, and they were everywhere on the streets.

Frank and his friends were taken to the headquarters of the Memphis Cycle Club, where they were entertained on the evening previous to the first day of the great meet. For all that Frank had been arrested for stealing a wheel, the members of the club were eager to meet him and be introduced. They had read in the papers the story of his daring defense of Ellie Welling.

There was one member of the club who avoided Frank. That was Harvy Bramble. He had been drinking freely, and was in a sullen mood. At times he looked as if he longed to strangle Frank.

Charlie had seen that the ones among the visitors at his home who wished to enter the races had been properly presented, and they were admitted as representatives of the Yale Combine, on Welling's recommendation.

On the following day the century run took place, being fifty miles out from the city and fifty miles back. A great crowd cheered the gay riders as they started away in the morning, and a howling mob welcomed the first to return in the afternoon.

Harvy Bramble had wagered much that Hegner, of Little Rock, would be the first in, and he nearly choked with astonishment as the first two riders came near enough for him to recognize them.

Neither was Hegner.

One was a Memphis youth by the name of Doe, and the other was Bart Hodge!

Almost neck and neck the two raced toward the finish. It was as exciting as a mile dash. The wildest excitement prevailed.

Hodge's face was set and drawn with pain. He was racing beneath a Southern sun, and he had felt the difference in the climate. Still, with that pluck that never gives up, he held even with his rival till within one hundred yards of the finish.

Then he was seen to sway, and the next minute he plunged from his wheel to the ground in a dead faint, although otherwise all right, and the Memphis man came in first, to the unbounded joy of the citizens of the place.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A WINNER.

The track was crowded with a great throng, and the grand stand was full. Men, women and children were there. It was like a scene at a horse race, but this was to be a race between human beings. There was a babel of voices, and one was heard crying:

"Here's my last hundred! Who takes it that Harris, of Memphis, is not the winner in the two-mile race?"

It was Harvy Bramble. His face was flushed and his eyes bloodshot. He did not wear a bicycle suit now. On his head was a silk hat, but his clothes were a loud plaid, showing abominable taste or utter disregard for conventionality. He looked like a young "sport" who wished to be considered "tough."

"I'll tell you what I will do, sir," said a quiet voice. "I will give you a better lay than that. I'll bet a hundred even with you that the fellow by the name of Merriwell wins this race."

"Merriwell!" sneered Bramble, looking at the quiet, plainly-dressed young man who had spoken the words. "Why, that chump won't be in it! I'll go you!"

The money was posted at once, for preparations were being made for the race to start.

"What's your name?" asked Bramble of the man with whom he had made the wager.

"You may call me Mr. Mortimer," was the answer.

A sudden hush fell on the throng. Those about the quarter stretch crowded to the ropes. Those in the grand stand craned their necks.

The starters were getting ready, seven in all. They were in line. Frank Merriwell was there, with his Flyer beneath him, waiting for the word.

Browning was steadying him, ready to give a great shove and send him away when the time came.

"Ready, gentlemen!"

It was the starter's voice. His hand was lifted, and a pistol glittered in his fingers.

"Go!"

The pistol cracked and away went the racers.

At the outset a rider from Nashville took the lead. He did it in a surprisingly easy manner. Harris, of Memphis, was second, while the others were bunched.

The excitement grew as they sped around the track, with Harris pressing the Nashville man, but none of the others seeming to press Harris.

"Where is Frank Merriwell?" laughed Harvy Bramble.

"You will hear of him later," retorted a voice, and Bramble saw Bart Hodge near at hand.

The excitement grew. Harris and the Nashville man were riding neck and neck. They came down the stretch in that manner.

Frank was with the bunch. He attracted no particular notice, but those who did regard him saw that he was riding with the utmost ease, and his face wore the ghost of a smile.

Past the grand stand flew the gay riders. The great crowd cheered, waving handkerchiefs and flags. It was a mighty roar, with which a shrill note was mingled.

Then, of a sudden, there was a burst of excitement. Something was happening.

A rider who had been packed in the bunch was forging to the front, weaving hither and thither as he went, and riding away from the others with amazing ease.

It was Frank Merriwell!

But Harris and his Nashville rider were far in advance. Surely Frank Merriwell could not overtake them.

He cleared the bunch, and then he fairly flew.

"See him! see him go!" shouted the spectators in amazement.

"Who is he?"

"Why, that's Frank Merriwell, the fellow who fought the mad dog. He's a Yale man."

"If he can keep up that pace he is a winner!"

"He can't do it! He is spurting, and he will drop in a minute."

But Frank showed no signs of dropping. On he went, closing the gap between himself and the leaders. It was wonderful how he seemed to walk over the ground with the speed of the wind.

Harvy Bramble ground his teeth. A furious light came into his red eyes. His heart was throbbing with mad rage.

"If he wins, I'm broke!" he muttered. "Furies! he shall not win!"

The three leaders were in the stretch. Merriwell was pressing them—he was passing Harris!

Then came a mad dash between Frank and the Nashville man, but Merry forged to the front with ease, while the grand stand roared its admiration.

Beside the track a crazed young fellow drew a revolver and pointed it at Frank. Then, with a great leap, Bart Hodge struck Bramble's arm and saved Frank Merriwell's life.

The revolver was discharged, but the bullet flew wild in the air.

A moment later Frank flew over the finish line a safe winner.

"Hurrah!"

"Frank has won!"

And then the Yale cheer rent the air.

Before Hodge could find an officer to arrest Bramble the rascal disappeared from the track. That night he fled from the city, having pawned a watch and ring to get money to do so. It was plain he feared prosecution for attempted murder.

And the Mr. Mortimer who had covered Bramble's last hundred dollars proved to be Mortimer Swett, the cousin of Charlie and Ellie Welling, and the inventor of the bicycle Frank rode.

Swett had been notified of Merriwell's arrest. He hastened to Memphis, and found out all the particulars. In the meantime he had obtained a clew to the real

thief, with the result that "Phil Derry," whose real name was Clifford Park, was arrested in Arkansas.

Derry had stolen the wheel at Cairo, Illinois, and had started for Texas. His story about trading a horse for the wheel was a lie. After getting into Arkansas, he had heard of the bicycle meet in Memphis, and decided to attend it. Then he and Merriwell met, and he traded the Flyer for Frank's bicycle.

When Swett arrived in Memphis it did not take him long to discover that the wheel which Frank was to ride, although it bore another name, was the one he had invented.

Knowing what a good rider could do on that wheel, he was ready enough to bet on Frank.

The real thief was brought into Memphis the following day, and enough proof was found to hold him, while the case against Merriwell was soon settled, as Swett refused to have anything to do with it, and Frank was discharged.

"You are lucky," said Diamond. "If that real thief hadn't been found matters would have gone against you."

"Frank is always lucky," put in Bruce. "He was born under a lucky star."

The boys were invited to make the Welling mansion their home during their stay in Memphis, and they remained there two days, during which their new-found friends did all that was possible to make the stay pleasant.

"And now we must go on," said Frank, on the

morning of the third day. "We have already delayed too long."

"That's right—as soon as you're comfortable make yourself uncomfortable," grumbled Bruce. "I could rest here for a month."

"Where away next?" queried Diamond.

"Yah, vere ve pin gone next annahow?" came from Hans.

The matter was talked over for fully an hour, and the combine decided to strike out for Kentucky.

"That suits me," said Harry. "I want to see Louisville. I used to have some friends there."

"Louisville it is," said Barney. "An' may our sthay there prove as pleasant as our sthop at this home."

"So say we all of us," came from Frank; and then the meeting broke up and the boys started to pack up.



## CHAPTER XXX.

### HEROIC HANS.

"Whoa!"

"Stop him!"

"Look out!"

A crowded city street, the sidewalks lined with pedestrians, and the roadway with vehicles of various descriptions.

Above the sounds of ordinary traffic came these commands and warning cries, and above them all rises an excited voice shouting:

"Clear the road! there's a runaway!"

A party of well-dressed boys were just crossing the street. There were seven of them. The absentees were Frank and Toots, who were attending to some business in another part of the city.

The combine had reached Louisville. The seven members referred to were not walking in any regular order, but were strolling along in pairs and singly, just as it happened.

Some of them had reached the curb on the opposite side of the street when the excitement about the runaway began.

All looked around to see the cause of the excitement.

Two or three blocks away a roan horse drawing a light buggy was coming toward them at a wild gallop.

The buggy was empty, and the reins were flying in the air.

Women and children went scudding into open doorways of stores for shelter; many a man also took the same safe, if not very courageous, course.

Other men ran to their own horses that were standing along the curb and caught their bit reins to prevent them from breaking away also.

Wagons and carriages in motion were turned aside and in some cases driven straight up onto the sidewalks to be out of the way.

A collision with that runaway would have most certainly made a complete wreck of the buggy, and probably the ruin of any other vehicle it struck.

The boys, who were already interested in the event, were a good deal more so when they overheard a man exclaim:

“Hang me if it ain’t Billy Leech’s Jupiter!”

Immediately on hearing this, the boys who had already reached the curb at the opposite side of the street craned their necks to get a better view of the excited animal.

He was then so far away that even if the boys had thought of running for shelter there would have been plenty of time for them to make themselves safe.

That was not what they thought of, however; even those who were in the middle of the street stood where they were taking in the spectacle calmly.

They were Ephraim, Hans and Bartley Hodge.

“Gee whillikins!” exclaimed Ephraim, “but that nag’s a flyer, ain’t he?”

"I don't see his wings alretty!" responded Hans.

"He's got wings on his hind feet, Dutchy," said Hodge, "and from the way he strikes out I should think he had a baseball bat gripped in each forepaw. We'd better be getting out of this or he'll knock us over."

With this Hodge started on toward the sidewalk. The other boys turned to accompany him, but halted again, thrilled with horror at a sudden change in the situation.

There was little more than a block's distance between them then and the oncoming animal.

The roadway had become fairly clear of vehicles, except for those that were drawn up along the curb.

Suddenly from out a cross street an old negro woman appeared pushing a little fruit cart in front of her. She was crossing directly in the path of the runaway, evidently unconscious of her danger.

It proved later that this old darky was as deaf as a post, and more than half blind; therefore, she had been unable to hear the cries of warning, and with her weak eyes fixed upon the road in front of her, she had not seen what was approaching at her left hand.

"Screat Gott, I mean Great Scott!" cried Harry, who was with those on the curb, "there'll be a collision."

"And one worthless nigger the less!" added a man who stood near him.

It was a cold-blooded remark, but it seemed to tell some truth, for the old darky woman was almost directly in front of the horse, and her pace was just

slow enough to bring her well in his way by the time he should reach the crossing.

The faces of the boys, who were too far away to be of any possible help, turned pale with pity and horror.

Suddenly from out the crowd that lined the edge of the walk at the upper end of the block, a lithe young figure darted straight toward the apple woman.

"It's Frank!" cried Hodge. "What should he risk his life for, I'd like to know?"

"He don't vas try ter stop der horse, ain't it?" exclaimed Hans, so excited that even his usually mixed English was more meaningless than ever.

Ephraim was staring open-mouthed. What his exact feelings were it would be impossible to say, for the only word that came from his parted lips was a shuddering "gosh!"

All the spectators were very quiet, for in that brief instant it seemed as if two human lives were at stake, and the end was awaited with too much interest to permit of any remark.

It proved that Frank had his wits as well as his courage about him.

He did not make any vain, hopeless effort to stop the excited animal, but instead he caught the colored woman around the waist, and with a vigorous movement yanked her backward; at the same instant he caught his foot in the wheel of the pushcart and gave that a pull, too.

Its contents were upset and scattered over the ground and the cart itself was yanked just far enough away to

be missed by the wheels of the buggy that went rumbling by.

The horse had veered slightly as it approached the apple woman, but it went thundering on now down the street.

There was a cheer from those at the upper end of the block when they saw that Frank's brave effort had been successful, but it was only for an instant.

All the people there now crowded into the street behind the runaway to make sure they should see the final outcome.

"Jimminy!" exclaimed Ephraim, "it's time this here meeting adjourned."

With that he made a leap toward the sidewalk upon which his companions were already standing. Hodge leaped with him and they reached the curb together.

Hans, the only one left in the middle of the roadway, had started also, but in the other direction.

"Hi, there, Hans!" called two or three of the boys together.

Hans heard them, halted and turned about. He started toward them and then, with a nervous glance toward the coming horse, seemed to feel that it would be easier for him to reach the other side; so he turned still again.

"He's lost his head!" muttered Bruce Browning, anxiously. "He don't know which way to turn."

That indeed seemed to be the case, for Hans, greatly excited not only by the runaway, but by Frank's perilous adventure, was looking first at the horse and then

at the sidewalks and wavering squarely in the middle of the street, utterly unable to decide which way to go.

It was only for a second or two, but in that short space the animal was covering the distance between him and Hans in great leaps.

"Get out of the way, Hans!" bawled several of the boys together.

"Donner und blitzen!" stammered Hans. "Vitch vay?"

He took a couple of steps in one direction, then turned wildly about and started in the other. It would have been ridiculous if it had not been so dangerous.

The horse perhaps had run out some of its own excitement; perhaps its nerves had been cooled a bit by the narrow escape of collision with the fruit cart.

Anyhow, as it approached Hans it, too, veered from side to side as if trying to dodge him. The trouble was that Hans took the horse each time by surprise.

If the horse turned a little to the right, Hans turned to his own left, and so stood in the way; and if the horse turned to the left there was Hans, too, dodging, perspiring with excitement, and fairly dancing with real terror.

So what the boys feared came about; the horse ran plumb into the German. The other members of the combine, the instant they saw the collision was bound to take place, leaped from the curb determined to do what they could to help their companion.

They did not get very far before they broke into laughter, for Hans, when the horse at last came upon him, put up both hands, caught the animal by the bits,



and held on with all his force, the result being that the horse stopped abruptly and stood snorting and trembling, but doing nothing more alarming than to stare in a kind of wondering way at the German.

"Hold still alretty, don'd it?" shouted Hans, wildly. "Let a feller get der way out, ain't it."

Having said this in the angriest manner possible, Hans dropped the bits and darted through the gathering crowd to the sidewalk. The horse looked after him apparently more perplexed than ever, and then began to walk on.

Diamond ran forward and caught him again by the bit, holding him still without difficulty. The other boys began to chaff Hans unmercifully.

"You show such great skill in handling animals," said Rattleton, "that I should think you were born on borse hack, I mean horseback.

"Hey, vhat's dat?" asked Hans.

"If you don't look out," remarked Browning, slowly, "you'll get your name in the papers as a hero."

"They'll be after hiring yeez for shortstop on the Louisville nine," said Barney.

"Well, I stopped der beast, ain't it?" demanded Hans, indignantly.

He began to feel that he ought to get some credit for his action.

"Pooh!" retorted Ephraim, "the nag had just got tired running, and fell up against yeou. It is a wonder you didn't tumble over like a straw man."

"Hey, vat's dat? You call me a straw man?"

"No, I didn't, but yeou weren't to blame for stoppin' the horse; yeou didn't know what yeou were doing."

This was the exact truth. Hans had been so excited that he had not the least thought of stopping the runaway and had only put up his hands at last as a matter of self-defense; but now that the deed was done he felt that he ought to get some credit for it instead of all this ridicule.

"See here, hayseed," he exclaimed, doubling up his fists and facing Ephraim angrily, "I vas no straw man, I don't t'ink, und no chay mit der hay his hair inside calls me so alretty, und I don't lick him ain't it?"

There was blood in the Dutch boy's eye. He was thoroughly mad and no mistake.

Ephraim saw this and although he did not mind much being called hayseed or a jay, for he was used to the joking of his companions, he believed that Hans was going to sail into him, and, therefore, raised his fists for defense.

None of the people around were paying any attention to them, for all were more interested in the horse, but just then Frank came up, having run from the other end of the block.

"I saw it all, Hans," he cried, clapping the German on the shoulder. "You did splendidly, by Jove! It was a great act."

Frank had heard just enough of the angry talk between Hans and Ephraim to understand the situation, and as he said this he gave the Vermonter a wink. Ephraim understood and immediately put down his hands.

"Dat vas all right, Vrank," responded Hans, looking at Frank gratefully. "Dat vas all right if you say so, but Ephraim here he t'ink I'm a straw man alretty."

"Nonsense!" he doesn't think anything of the kind," said Frank, "he's only joking you."

He gave another glance at Ephraim, who quickly responded:

"Thet's right, Dutchy; I was jealous of yeou. There isn't a fellow in the combine thet wouldn't hev been glad tew be in yeour place."

"Den you take dat all back what you said, don't it?"

"Gracious Peter! yes," returned Ephraim, laughing, "I'll take anything back tew save a row."

"Let us take a look at the horse," said Frank, certain now that trouble among his friends had been avoided.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### LOOKING FORWARD TO A RACE.

They pushed their way into the crowd surrounding the horse and immediately after them came a smooth-faced, middle-aged man, who asked, anxiously:

"Has anything happened to the horse?"

"No, Leech," some one answered, "Jupiter's as sound as ever, and quiet enough now, but if you're thinking of racing him you ought to keep him at the paddock."

"That's just where I will keep him hereafter," was the response; "I never ought to have brought him into town. Where is the man that stopped him?"

Frank turned and pointed to Hans.

"There's the chap that did the trick," he said, seriously.

"Ain't you the young man who dragged the nigger and the applecart out of the way?" he asked.

"Well, I had a hand in it," Frank responded "but this is the one who finally stopped your horse."

"Nein! nein!" exclaimed Hans, feeling rather awkward now that credit for the deed was thrust upon him. "Der hoss stopped himself up alretty!"

"Don't you think it, Mr. Leech!" exclaimed Frank, earnestly. "If my friend hadn't got in the way there's no telling how far Jupiter would have gone."

"That's all right, and I'm much obliged to your friend," returned Leech, "but I didn't see that part of

it; what I did see from the window was the way you jumped into the street and yanked the nigger aside so that a collision was avoided."

"That didn't amount to anything."

"Don't you think it, young man! If there had been a collision the buggy would have gone all to smash anyway, and Jupiter might have sprung a joint or got some other injury that I just couldn't stand at this stage of the game."

"You think a great deal of Jupiter, I suppose, Mr. Leech?"

"A good deal! Well, I should say so! he's won more money for me than any horse I ever had."

"And you think of having him win the Darley plate for you, don't you?" asked a bystander.

"Yes," said Leech, "and after he's won that race I'll sell him for a reasonable price, and then I shan't be so anxious as to what happens to him."

"It wouldn't surprise me a little bit," remarked Frank, "if Jupiter didn't win the Darley."

By this time Leech had got to his horse's head, which he was stroking while he looked the animal over critically to see whether he had received any injury that had escaped the observation of others.

"Eh, what's that?" he said, sharply, with another keen glance at Frank.

"Jupiter is a good horse," Frank responded, "and I already know that he can run well, but I know another horse that's entered for the Darley plate that's a good one and that can run like lightning."

"Yeou can bet dollars tew doughnuts on thet!" added Ephraim under his breath.

Leech stared at Frank for a moment before he replied.

"I thought I knew every horse entered for the Darley plate, except one that was entered three or four days ago."

"I guess that's the one I'm speaking about," returned Frank, mischievously.

"Say," said Leech, with great interest, "is your name Merriwell?"

"Yes."

"And are you the young fellow from the North that has sent home for his horse to run in the Darley race?"

"You've guessed it, Mr. Leech."

Leech drew a long breath, then whistled, gave his horse a final pat and climbed into the buggy. After that he looked down at Frank and said:

"This is a mighty queer situation. Did you know that it was Jupiter running away when you tackled the nigger woman?"

"No, I didn't. I didn't know what horse it was or whose until I came down in to the crowd here."

"Did you know it was Jupiter?" asked Leech, addressing Hans.

"Ya," the German boy responded, "I heard someboty dat he vas Billy Leech's Jupiter in der crowd speak out."

"Oh, you did, eh?"

"Ya, I knew alretty dat he Jupiter vas, und I t'inks I save him der race ter run."



Leech's brows wrinkled as if he found some difficulty in understanding the boy's mixed language, but after a moment he said:

"Well, Merriwell, between you and your Dutch friend you've saved the horse that's going to beat you for the Darley plate."

With this, he told Jupiter to get up and drove away before Frank had time to make any reply, even if he had thought of doing so.

"Billy can't understand that," remarked one of the bystanders, with a laugh.

"Understand what, sir?" asked Frank.

"Why, Billy Leech is a good deal of a sport, but not quite enough of a one to lose good naturedly; he'd rather most anything would happen than lose a race, and what he's thinking of is that if it was your horse that was running away he'd have let him run to thunderation and make himself fit for nothing except the soap factories before Bill would put out a hand to stop him."

"That doesn't sound like a true Kentucky sport," remarked Frank.

His informant laughed rather disagreeably.

"There are sports and sports," he responded, "and in Kentucky as everywhere else there are men who claim to be gentlemen who don't deserve the title."

Now that Leech had driven away with the horse there was nothing further to interest the crowd, and it began to disperse rapidly. Frank and his friends went on together.

"What do you think of Jupiter, Frank?" asked Diamond.

"He's a fine-looking animal," answered Frank, "but I can't see any reason why I shouldn't hope to beat him with Mayfair."

"Mayfair must be a mighty good horse, then."

"A thoroughbred," said Frank, shortly.

"He's got to be to beat Jupiter."

"Well," remarked Frank, quietly, "we shan't weep if we lose. We'll have a good fair race of it, and if Jupiter wins why we'll go on and tackle the next thing."

"I hope Mayfair will win, not only because he is your horse, Frank, but because I took an intense dislike to that man Leech.

"I don't think myself," said Frank, "that he's the kind of a man I should like to chum with."

"Chum with!" exclaimed Diamond, in disgust. "Why, he didn't so much as say thank you to either you or Hans."

"Oh, well! he admitted that we had done him a service."

"Yes, but in such a gruff way that he might as well have said nothing."

Frank made no response; he had felt as Diamond did, that Leech's manner was far from that of a gentleman, but he had taken no especial dislike to him for the general reason that he had no expectation of meeting Leech again excepting as they should meet on the race course and, therefore, he did not think the man worth any further thought.

The Yale Combine had decided to send their bicycles home by train and journey eastward by easy stages, taking in as they went every important athletic or sporting event they could hear of for the purpose of witnessing the event in any case, and taking part in the sport if possible.

As we know, they had had several interesting meets in the Southwest, and as they approached Kentucky they very naturally thought of the fame the State has for thoroughbred horses, and made inquiries as to any races that had been arranged for the near future.

They learned that a racing meet was about to open in the park called Churchill Downs, near Louisville, and as there was no other sporting or athletic event in progress anywhere near, they decided to see what could be done there.

It did not look at first as if they could do any more than join the spectators at the races, which was not so much to their liking as taking part in the contest.

Then Frank electrified them by announcing that he was going to enter a horse in one of the races.

It seemed that one of the most important races of the meet was one called the Darley plate; this was for gentlemen riders, that is, for horses ridden by their owners.

It was not to come off until the meet had been in progress for a few days, and this gave Frank time to send to his Northern home for his horse.

His friends in the combine were wild with interest over the event, for it was unlike anything they had undertaken heretofore; so they encouraged Frank to en-

ter his horse, and he had done so at the last possible moment without knowing anything about the contestants except that William Leech's Jupiter was put down as a sure winner.

Then he had telegraphed home, and on this day the horse was expected by fast freight.

The boys had started for the station to meet it, while Frank and Toots had gone to make arrangements for a stable. Diamond asked him about this as they went along.

"I made the best deal possible," Frank answered; "I found that there is a big stable at the Downs in which there is room enough for a dozen more horses than there are now.

"The stable belongs to Col. Harding, who has taken his string of thoroughbreds to the Eastern race tracks; his agent here has told me to take Mayfair to the colonel's stable and make myself at home there."

"Then we'll just hope," said Diamond, "that Mayfair comes along in good condition."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### A CHANCE TO MAKE MONEY.

The fast freight came in on time and in a splendid box-car by himself was Mayfair. He was taken off at once, and after he had stepped rather gingerly down the inclined plank that was set up for him he neighed loudly, as much as to say he was glad the journey was over.

There was little doubt that he recognized his young master, and was delighted to see him; he kept rubbing his handsome head over Frank's arms, and the boy could not turn without the horse whinneying and starting after.

All the other boys stood around and looked on with great interest; the most critical among them was Diamond.

"You've got a good one and there's no mistake, Frank," he said at length. "I wouldn't mind plunging a bit on him——"

"I wouldn't bet on the event if I were you, Jack," Frank interrupted; "of course, it's none of my business, as you'll do as you please, but I'd rather put the thing through for sport's sake."

"That's your way of looking at it," said Diamond; "I don't see much use in running a horse race unless there's a little money up, and whether you like it or not

I shall have something at stake when the Darley plate is run."

"You may lose."

"Of course, but I shan't cry baby if I do."

There was a mischievous smile on Diamond's face, and he added:

"I think I know somebody who would lend me my carfare home if I should get stuck."

"I shouldn't wonder, Jack," Frank replied, "but the combine will be in pretty bad shape if every man in it should bet the same way and lose."

"Phew! that would strap us."

"I was thinking of that," Frank went on, "when I advised that you do no betting. As I said before, that's your lookout, and if you do bet I really think you ought to do so without thinking of the possibility that you can borrow carfare."

"All right, then, I'll only bet what I can afford to lose, but I tell you now, Frank, that if Mayfair behaves in practice as well as he looks, I shall back him."

"It may take him a day or two to get over the effects of the journey," said Frank, thoughtfully.

Without any desire to win money by racing, and with only a real sporting interest in the event, Frank nevertheless took the matter very seriously.

It would have broken his heart to enter a race and lose, but he wanted to make a good showing, and as he thought of Mayfair's long journey from the North he began to fear a little that the horse would not be able to do himself justice.

At the present moment, excited with getting away



from the restraint of the box-car, with its constant confinement, the animal seemed capable of running for miles at top speed. Frank knew that this was an indication of nervousness rather than staying power, and he made up his mind, therefore, to keep a constant watch upon the horse to see that he should not be overdone or in any way mishandled previous to the important event.

He had engaged a buggy to be brought to the station; Mayfair was harnessed into this, and Frank took Diamond with him in it to Col. Harding's stable at the course outside the city.

The other boys went up to the stable in a coach they had hired for the purpose, and a lively, noisy time they had of it on the way, singing songs and letting off college yells that made the sleepy darkies in the fields alongside look up in wonder.

There was a hotel at the Downs, and the combine promptly engaged quarters there, for now that they were interested in the races more than as ordinary spectators they didn't care about being in the city.

For that matter, no city ever had much attraction for them; they preferred to be out in the open air, and the only thing that troubled them here was the fact that there was so little for each of them to do.

Bruce Browning naturally had no regret for this.

"I think I shall have a good time here," he growled, lazily, "for it's the first time, Merriwell, since you got me into this racket that I haven't had to work like a plowhorse."

"I was just going to suggest," responded Frank,

mischievously, "that you act as Mayfair's hostler until the race is run."

"Nit," retorted Browning. "I know you better and you know me better."

"Well, but how will you pass the time?" asked Frank, solemnly.

"Don't you worry about me," was the reply. "I'm going to find the softest spot I can up in the hay and fit myself into it; if I happen to be awake when the Darley plate comes off I'll get up and take it in, but besides that I don't intend to stir."

"Go on wid yeeze for a loafer!" exclaimed Barney. "Yeez'll be at the rail ahead of anybody, and there'll be noo rooting for the rest of us because of the noise yeez'll make when Mayfair comes down the home stretch."

"Oh! I'll yell for Mayfair fast enough," responded Browning, "if I happen to be awake."

"Say, Frank," said Ephraim, "speaking of hostlers, I've had a heap tew dew with horses when I've been to hum; I'm jest hankerin' tew help yew tew take care of thet nag."

"All right, Eph, you're the very one that I was thinking I should like to help."

"Bully! What shall I do first?"

"Give him a good rubbing down. If he was a child instead of a horse I should say give him a bath, for he needs it badly. His coat is thick with dust from his long journey."

"All right, Frank, I'll make him shine like a new cent, by gosh!"

Ephraim immediately sat down on the stable floor and pulled off his shoes and stockings.

"No use in gettin' my shoes spoiled," he remarked, when some one of the others looked at him in surprise, "I'm tew dew this job thorough, I be, an' I hev always noticed that the best hostlers go 'round stables bare-foot."

"Say, Frank," said Hodge, strolling in from the outside, "there's a man named Terry outside there who wants to see you."

Frank knew nobody in Kentucky by that name, but he went out, nevertheless, and saw Diamond in conversation with a sharp-eyed, dark-faced man who appeared to be about forty years old.

"Here comes the owner of Mayfair, Mr. Terry," Diamond said, as Frank approached.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Merriwell," exclaimed Terry, holding out his hand.

Frank took it and made a polite response.

"Fine horse you have there," remarked Terry, with a quick, sharp glance into Frank's eyes.

"I always thought pretty well of him," was Frank's quiet response.

"I don't happen to know his record," Terry went on; "from the time he was entered I looked over my racing books, and I don't remember that I saw Mayfair down anywhere excepting that the name was given and his pedigree——"

"His pedigree has been published as a matter of record," interrupted Frank, "but Mayfair has never run in a public race."

"You don't say so! Then this is his maiden effort?"

"In public, yes."

"But he has raced in private?"

"Oh, yes, a few times."

"You've some notion, then, as to how well he can do, what time he makes, and so on?"

"I've a rather clear idea of what he can do when he's in good condition, Mr. Terry."

"Ah! yes, his condition; and hasn't he stood the journey well?"

"Very well indeed."

"Then you believe he'll be in fine shape for the Darley plate?"

"I hope so."

"You wouldn't think," said Diamond, proudly, "that Mayfair has come a thousand miles or so on a freight train if you were to look at him."

"I have looked at him," said Terry. "I went down to the station to see him, and I watched him as he was driven away. Great horse, sir, great horse! I should like to know him better."

This was said with another of those quick glances at Frank.

"You shall have as much opportunity as anybody else for knowing him better, Mr. Terry," Frank said. "My only desire is to run a good race, and I want the best horse to win. Mayfair will be exercised where anybody who cares to do so can look on."

"Ah, yes, very sportsmanlike."

Terry hesitated a moment, and then, rather doubtfully, said:

"Could I—could I have a word with you in private, Mr. Merriwell?"

"Oh, excuse me," said Diamond, hastily, "I wasn't aware that I was in the way."

Frank was on the point of insisting that he had no secrets from his friends, and that whatever Terry had to say should be said in Diamond's presence, but the latter took himself away in a hurry.

"You're a stranger in Kentucky, Mr. Merriwell," began Terry at once.

Frank nodded.

"I'm greatly interested in horses," Terry went on. "I always attend the races and generally make a plunge or two. I have the reputation of picking more winners than any other man in the State."

"I congratulate you, Mr. Terry," Frank responded, coldly, "but I have no special interest in that matter, for I am not racing with any idea of making money out of it."

"Ah, indeed!"

Terry looked disappointed.

"You just back your own horse," he said, "and if you lose you stand your loss and look pleasant, I suppose, that's it, isn't it?"

"I don't bet one way or the other," said Frank.

Terry stared. It was evident that he did not believe Frank; he could not understand even as well as Diamond did, how a man could take an interest in a horse race without betting on it.

He seemed to be thinking it over for a moment and apparently he concluded that Frank was trying to lead him on, for he said :

"I presume we shall understand each other after a moment, Mr. Merriwell."

"I don't know what there is to misunderstand," was Frank's response. "One of my friends told me that you wished to see me."

"Ah, yes! and I suppose you prefer I would come to the point at once?"

"Very much so, as I want to look after my horse."

"Well, it's just this, Mr. Merriwell. Billy Leech is a most unpopular character down here."

"I'd already got that idea."

"Quite likely, but you can't understand it all unless you are familiar with the history of racing events in Kentucky.

"Billy Leech don't enter in many races, but when he does he usually wins; when he doesn't he makes a terrible row about it. It's got so now that oftentimes a man won't enter a horse in the race with Leech because it's likely to be so disagreeable."

Frank said nothing, and after a slight pause Terry continued :

"Now, there's quite a number of men besides myself who were pleased that a Northern horse had been entered for the Darley plate.

"They hoped that it was a horse that would beat Leech, and, like myself, a good many of them went



down to the railroad station to see what kind of an animal you had brought along.

"Like myself, Mr. Merriwell, they were greatly pleased with the sight of Mayfair, and there isn't a man of them that doesn't think he can walk away with Jupiter."

"I'm glad they think so well of him," said Frank, "but I must say I don't see what you're coming to."

"You wait a bit, and I'll get there," answered Terry. "I'm on the home stretch now; the point is just this."

Here his voice sank to a whisper.

"All these fellows being anxious to have Jupiter beaten, and being pleased with Mayfair, will go off and bet a pot of money on your horse.

"Leech, being in the race already, will take everything that's offered clear up to the limit, so you see he'll stand to win or lose a big pot.

"Now as long as he's taking everything that's offered and the other fellows are confident, there'll be plenty of money up and so there'll be one of the most glorious chances to rake off a pot for yourself, see?"

"I told you I didn't intend to back my horse!" said Frank, starting to return to the stable.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Merriwell, you don't catch my drift yet."

Terry caught him by the sleeve and pulled him back. The conversation was extremely disagreeable to Frank, but he thought it better to hear it out than to have trouble; so he waited while Terry explained himself further.

"You're a stranger here," said Terry, "and of course it don't make very much difference to you really whether you win the race or not. You could stand losing the race, couldn't you?"

"I hope so."

"Well, then, suppose, contrary to everybody's expectations and hopes, that Mayfair didn't win? Just suppose that Mayfair put up a mighty good race and that Juupiter won by a length or even by a neck, eh?"

"Well, suppose," said Frank, sharply. "What, then?"

"Why, don't you see," said Terry, "those of us who put our money up on Jupiter would be very glad to divide our winnings with you?"

For the space of about one second Frank looked Terry straight in the eye while his face flushed a deep crimson and then became very pale.

It was only about a second, but it was long enough to give Terry time to see that he had made a mistake in suggesting a crooked deal to this young man, and he began to edge away.

His lips parted, mumbling some kind of an apology, but he had not spoken many words before he stopped abruptly.

Frank's arm shot forward like the piston rod of a locomotive, and his fist had landed squarely on Terry's jaw. Terry threw up both hands too late to ward off the blow, and, staggering back, sat down heavily upon the turf.

Frank calmly took out his handkerchief and began to wipe his knuckles.

"I hate to soil my fist," he said, contemptuously, "on a mouth like that, but the next time you try to talk to me perhaps you'll be a little more decent about it."

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### CALTROPS.

Two or three of the combine were standing in the stable doorway when this occurred. They did not know what was the matter or suspect it, but they saw Frank knock the stranger down.

That was enough for them. They gave a yell that aroused all the others, and they came running across the turf to his assistance.

"What's he tried to do to you, Frank?" exclaimed Rattleton.

"He insulted me," Frank answered, "but he won't do so again; let him alone."

Terry got up slowly, pressing his hand to his bruised jaw. There was a spot or two of blood there.

"You'll be sorry for this, young fellow," he muttered, and his voice trembled with rage.

"I don't think so," Frank returned. "You insulted me."

"Insulted you, has he?" cried Rattleton, excitedly. "Shall I give another jiff in the baw, I mean biff on the jaw?"

Rattleton was dancing around wildly, spoiling for a fight, and Terry backed away uneasily.

"No, no," exclaimed Frank, laying his hand on Rattleton's arm, "he's a miserable cur and one slap is enough. Let's go back to the stable."

"I'll make you regret this the longest day you ever lived, you young ruffian!" called Terry after them.

"Give me lave to thump him, Frank," cried Barney.

"You're an infernal coward, Merriwell!" shouted Terry, his voice growing louder as the boys walked away. "You're surrounded with a pack of Northern toughs, but if you were alone now——"

Frank turned around calmly, giving a gesture to his friends to remain where they were, and walked slowly toward Terry. The latter gave him one look, then wheeled about and ran away at full speed.

The members of the combine laughed derisively. Terry turned for a moment and shook his fist at them, but continued on without stopping.

"What was it all about, Frank?" asked Diamond. "He seemed to be a decent enough fellow when he was talking to me."

"He was trying to bribe me to throw the race," replied Frank.

"To throw the race!" cried Diamond.

"Bribe you?" cried Rattleton.

"He found he ran up against the wrong customer, didn't he?" asked Bruce.

"Well, the less said about it the better," answered Frank, frowning. "It's mighty unpleasant to be approached that way, and it surprised me so that for a second or more I didn't know whether to hit him or just walk away; perhaps I'd ought to have done the latter."

"Not much!" exclaimed Hodge, "you did just right, Frank, but I wish you could have given us the word

so that we could have ducked him in the watering trough."

"No, no, it's better as it is; if I'd kept my temper I might have been able to show him that he had tackled the wrong man with such a scheme and he might have gone away without being mad about it; as it is I certainly made him an enemy——"

"What do you care about an enemy of that kind?" asked Diamond.

"Oh, I don't care in one sense, but it will make me a little anxious until the race is run."

"Do you think he may put up some kind of a job on you?"

"Well, he isn't the kind of a man to do anything openly, for he hasn't the nerve, but he's just made for treachery. Come into the stable a minute."

All followed Frank into the stable, and after they were once inside he closed the stable doors.

"I must say," he remarked, "that this thing has excited me a little bit; it shows that while we're in a place where true sport is cultivated, there are plenty of crooked men ready to do a crooked trick."

"You mustn't think that he's a Kentucky gentleman, Frank," said Diamond; "I'm a Southerner myself, and while I know there are mean men in the South——"

"I know just what you're going to say, Jack," interrupted Frank. "I don't think any less of Kentucky or of her people, for this, but it does make me feel that perhaps we ought to take special care so as to prevent any trick being done to Mayfair."



The boys agreed that it would be well to take precautions, but it was rather hard for them to decide just what they should do.

Frank declared that he was going to sleep in the stable.

"There are two or three rooms here for hostlers," he said, "and they're all unoccupied. I shall take one of them."

"And I'll take another," said Diamond.

There was a chorus of voices then claiming the third room, at which Frank smiled.

"You can't all have it," he said, good-humoredly.

The loyalty of his friends did a great deal toward making him forget the unpleasant incident with Terry.

"Well," said Hodge, "Bruce has already chosen his room on the haymow."

Bruce shook his head seriously.

"A joke's a joke," he said, "and I'm glad enough that we are not entered in any sports or games, but if it comes to defending the interests of the combine Frank can count on me as well as on anybody else and he knows it."

"Of course I do, Bruce."

"And," continued Bruce, "if he says the word I'll stand up all night outside the stable door."

"Oh, I'm sure there won't be any necessity for such an extreme measure as that," said Frank, "but what I'm thinking of is this:

"There are five or six horses here belonging to Col. Hardy that are looked after by the stablemen employed at the hotel. Now, three of us, say Diamond,

Eph and myself, can occupy the rooms in the stable and the rest of you be at the hotel. With so many of us it shouldn't be a difficult task to make certain that no trick is done to Mayfair."

"That's so," said one and another.

"And besides that," added Frank, "now that I've cooled down I don't much think there'll be any trick; this man Terry is just a loafer who thought that because I'm a boy it might be possible to rig up a scheme for a crooked race.

"He's found out his mistake, and that's probably the last we'll hear of him. I don't believe the Louisville race course is overrun with such fellows."

"Just the same, Frank," said Diamond, "you'd better stick to the arrangement of occupying the stable yourself."

"Oh, yes, we'll stick to that, but we won't worry any more about it. How's the horse getting on, Eph?"

Eph had stopped his work of rubbing down Mayfair when the excitement about Terry had withdrawn the others from the stable. During the conversation afterward he had stood with an empty pail in his hand listening eagerly.

"Oh, the nag's all hunky, Frank," returned Eph now. "He's good for a mile in two minutes any time you want tew run him. I'm jes' goin' tew get another pail of water at the pump outside an' douse his feet; then I'll put him in his stall and let the critter cool down a while."

Frank glanced at the horse, saw that he was in good condition and nodded approvingly.

"Go ahead, Eph," he said, "the douse on his feet will do him good."

Eph was already pushing open the stable doors; he had his trousers rolled up to his knees.

The other boys stood in the stable watching the thoroughbred while Eph went part way across the yard to the pump.

At the very entrance to the stable there was a small gravel space, but beyond that the ground was well grassed.

Eph had got part way to the pump when he suddenly dropped his pail and sat down in the grass with an exclamation of pain. He crossed one leg over the other and examined his foot.

"Dad bim it!" the boys heard him say, "what in thunderation is that?"

"Have you stepped on a thistle, Eph?" asked Hodge.

"More likely he's tackled the business end of a bee," remarked Bruce.

Eph was too busy studying his foot to make any response. Frank and the others strolled out slowly to where he sat.

"What's wrong, Eph?" asked Frank.

"I stepped on some darn thing," replied the Vermonter, "that was sharp es a knife, and I was trying tew see if any of it stayed in the foot."

"What do you suppose it was?"

"I dunno, seemed like 'twas a spike, or a nail, only sharper, but there ain't no boards lying around here——"

Frank and one or two others fell on their knees in the grass and began to feel around.

"Here it is!" said Hodge, presently.

He held up something at which he looked rather curiously.

"Let's see the pesky thing!" exclaimed Eph, reaching out his hand.

Hodge handed it to him, and Eph remarked:

"Looks like a jackstone with the nubs filed down tew points, don't it?"

"It isn't a jackstone," remarked Frank, quietly.

There was something in the tone that caused all the other boys to look at him expectantly.

"What do you make of it, Frank?" asked Bruce Browning.

Frank pressed his lips together and was silent for a moment.

"May I nivver see the ould sod ag'in," exclaimed Barney Mulloy, "if it don't seem as if that quare bit of iron with the sharp p'int's wasn't made to stick into the feet."

"That's it, Barney," said Frank, "but it wasn't intended to stick into a human foot. It's a caltrop."

"Caltrop," repeated two or three of the boys together, "what's that?"

Frank pointed at the piece of iron. It was, as Eph had suggested, something like a jackstone in the way little arms reached out from the central mass of iron, but each arm was sharply rounded, and it was so made that if tossed upon the ground, no matter how it fell,

one of these points would be sticking straight upward.

"That's a caltrop," said Frank. "I never saw one before, but I'm sure of it, for I have read about them. They are used in war time to check an advance of cavalry.

"Scatter them over ground that is to be crossed by horses, and you're almost certain to disable a great many of the animals. This one, you see, was lying directly in the route that would be taken by a horse walking from the stable door to the watering trough."

"Then," said Diamond, aghast, "you think it was put there to disable Mayfair?"

"I'm afraid so," Frank responded, gravely. "At any rate, where there's one caltrop there must be another; let's look the ground over."

The boys immediately began to look, with the result that in a few minutes they had found a dozen of the mischievous articles. They were all placed about as the first had been in the course that would be likely to be taken by a horse in going from stable to trough and back again.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### FRANK'S SHREWD MOVE.

"The things were probably put here," remarked Diamond, "while we had the stable door closed."

"I shouldn't wonder," Frank responded, "and it makes me glad that I closed the doors."

"I don't see why," said Diamond, "for it gave the sneaking scoundrel a chance to work without being caught at it."

"Don't you see," Frank exclaimed, "that by giving him a chance to work we've had the chance to discover that an attempt is being made to put up a job on Mayfair?"

"I had the doors closed so that we might be able to talk alone, for I was afraid some of the hangers-on around the course would come in. Now, if we hadn't found these caltrops we might still be in doubt as to whether Mayfair was in any danger or not."

"I admit, Frank, that it's a mighty good thing we found the caltrops, for it justifies your fears and shows that we must be on our guard from now until the time of the race."

"Who do you suppose did it, Frank?" asked Hodge.

"Why, I hadn't thought of anybody but Terry."

"That's natural enough, for he may have sneaked back here as soon as he saw the stable doors closed,



but do you suppose he's the only one who would like to see Mayfair beaten?"

"Well, no; there are probably others."

"Bet your life there are, Frank, and it would be a good scheme if we could find out who they are."

"Rather difficult task, I am afraid."

"But can't we make an effort?"

"I don't know——"

Suddenly Frank's eyes lighted with an idea.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "Most of the jockeys and stable employees at the Downs are colored boys; why shouldn't we send Toots out among them, let him fall into conversation with them and see what he can pick up?"

"Bully!"

"What do you say, Toots?" asked Frank.

"I'se like tuh try it," the colored boy answered, with a grin. "Neber did no detective work——"

"You'll never have a better opportunity," Frank interrupted. "It'll be dead easy for you, for all you need to do is to make friends with some of the boys around the stables and listen to what they have to say.

"They'll be sure to talk about Mayfair, and it'll be the most natural thing in the world for you to ask questions about Jupiter and Billy Leech, his owner. Then you can come back and tell me what the boys said."

"I'se do de bery bes' I kin," said Toots, looking as if he felt proud that he was to undertake something of importance for Frank and the combine.

He left the stable at once and was gone three or

four hours. During that time the rest of the boys remained there passing the time as best they could.

There was nothing for them to do, but every one of them felt that Frank's thoroughbred was in danger and that it would be wrong not to remain on guard.

There were a good many visitors to the stable. They consisted of horse owners, jockeys and racing men generally, who came in to get a look at Mayfair and to scrape acquaintance with the young owner. Frank welcomed them all politely, and willingly had the horse walked out of his stall on several occasions in order that the visitors might get a better view of him; at such times, too, he had Ephraim remove the blanket with which the thoroughbred was covered.

Frank kept a quiet watch on all the visitors, but saw nothing in the actions of any of them to arouse his suspicions.

Many of them spoke highly of Mayfair's appearance and prophesied that he would win easily over Jupiter. Not a few of them appeared to be glad of the prospect, and it was evident that in one respect, at least, Terry had told the truth; Leech was a very unpopular man.

"Jupiter is a grand horse," said one of the visitors, "and ordinarily I should hate to see a Kentucky horse beaten by a horse from a distance, but I'm thinking more of the owner than the horse, Mr. Merriwell, and I'm free to say that I hope to see you win out."

Frank thanked the man for his good wishes and responded quietly that he hoped to win.

"But," he added, "I shan't play the baby act if I'm beaten in a fair race."

"You'll have a fair race, Mr. Merriwell, don't worry about that."

Frank declared that he was not worrying in the least, saying that he had the highest respect for Kentucky sportsmen. So the afternoon passed pleasantly enough and the visitors who called at Col. Harding's stable not only went away with a good impression of Mayfair, but with great admiration for the thoroughbred's owner.

When evening came Frank sent all the boys except Eph over to the hotel for dinner.

"We'll stay here," he said. "There won't be any visitors probably from now on, and you can have the head waiter send over something for Eph and me to eat."

The boys willingly adopted Frank's suggestion, for they were ravenously hungry.

As soon as they were gone Frank turned to Eph and said:

"I suppose there was some good reason why you chose that stall for Mayfair?"

"I dunno," returned Eph, doubtfully, "it's 'bout in the middle of the stable and right handy. I thought 'twas 'bout es good a stall es there was left empty, don't yeou?"

"The stall is good enough," Frank answered, "but I don't believe we'll let Mayfair stay there."

"I hope I ain't made no mistake, Frank?"

"No, you've done just right, but I've got an idea that I'd rather see Mayfair in some other place."

"Where'll yeou hev him, then? There's plenty of empty stalls."

"I know there are," said Frank, "but let's see if we can't find one that's occupied now that will do by shifting the horses."

"Ef yeou do thet yeou'll hev a dozen stalls tew choose from."

"All right, let's look them over."

They accordingly went from stall to stall, Frank paying more attention to the horses in them than to the stalls themselves. Presently at the far end of the stable he halted and said:

"This one will do."

"Wal," remarked Eph, thoughtfully, "ef yeou say so I suppose it will, but it appears tew me like the meanest stall in the layout and the nag thet's in there now ain't nothing more than an old plug. I'll bet he couldn't yank a plow across an acre lot without falling down in the furrow."

"What do you think the horse is worth, Eph?"

Before replying, the Vermonter led the animal from the stall and looked him over critically. It was evidently a very old, useless horse, although in its day it may have been a racer.

"Wal," said Ephraim, "I wouldn't take him as a gift, much less pay out good money for him."

"See that white spot on the end of his nose?" asked Frank.

"H'm, h'm."

"It's quite like the spot on the end of Mayfair's, isn't it?"

"H'm, h'm, but thet don't make a horse out of him, Frank."

"Sure enough, but it gives a good excuse for changing the stalls. Shift the horses, Eph, and put Mayfair's blanket on this one."

"What! dew yeou mean tew say thet yeou're going tew put thet garl darn fine blanket on this old plug?"

"That's exactly what I meant to say, Eph; I hope I made my meaning clear?"

"Wal, Frank, there's no fault tew find with your language, but yeour idees, gosh all hemlock, I never hearn tell——"

"Never mind, Eph," said Frank, with a smile, "just make the change as quick as you can before anybody comes."

Ephraim stirred himself, and in a few moments the horses were transferred and Mayfair's elegant blanket covered the worthless plug completely.

By that time Toots returned. His dark face was, if possible, darker than usual.

"Well, boss," said Frank, cheerfully, "what have you discovered?"

"I'se terrible scared, Frank," Toots answered.

"What's up?"

"More an' I can tell, but suffin's in de wind foh suah!"

"Well, what have you heard?"

"Furst place, Frank, dat rascal, Terry, is t'ick wid Leech."

"I'm not surprised."

"Dey's in all kinds ob deals togedder an' de stable boys has de opinion dat dere ain't no deal too crooked for dem tuh go intoh."

"That doesn't surprise me, either."

"Leech an' Terry," continued Toots, "has had dere heads togedder 'bout a t'ousand times to-day an' dey's all de time looking cross-eyed ober tuh dese here stables. Some ob de jockeys tole how dere's odder men like Terry who b'long tuh Leech."

"Belong to him, eh?"

"Yas, he owns dem like dey was slaves; dey do all he says. Leech neber tries to bribe a jockey to trow a race, but it's one ob dese odder chaps dat does de dirty work.

"'Pears tuh me, Frank, you'll hab tuh look twice at eberybody who comes tuh de stable. I couldn't find out no partic'lars——"

"You've done more than I expected, Toots," interrupted Frank, kindly. "No one would suppose that these rascals would give away their plans, but it's important to know that Leech and Terry are in some kind of partnership. Go over to the hotel now and get your dinner."

Toots went away promptly and he had hardly gone before a long-bearded man presented himself at the stable door. He wore spectacles, a very ancient stove-pipe hat, and a long linen duster. In his right hand he carried a wooden box that looked something like a small-sized tool chest.

"Is Mr. Merriwell here?" he asked.



"That is my name," Frank responded, "what can I do for you?"

"Nothing maybe," responded the caller, "but maybe I can do something for you."

With this he handed out a soiled card.

Frank took it and read:

"Joshua Tompkins, Veterinary Surgeon."

"I don't think we have need of your services, doctor," said Frank, "but if we should have I shall be glad to know where to find you."

"You can always find me, colonel," responded the doctor, "by asking any of the stable boys at the paddock. Are you quite sure that you haven't got any use for a surgeon just now?"

"Quite," answered Frank, shortly.

"I heard about your horse coming from a long distance," continued the doctor, "and thought maybe it might need a little fixing up."

As he said this his eyes were upon the stall occupied at that time by the old plug. As it was after sundown and growing dark outside, the interior of the stable was very gloomy.

It would have been impossible for even the members of the combine to tell that the horse of that stall was not Mayfair.

"Well, you know," responded the veterinary, "the owner can't always tell. I'm an expert, you understand, and I might be able to find some trouble that had escaped your attention. Better let me make an examination of the horse. It won't cost you nothing,



and if he's all right, as you say, I shan't ask you to buy any medicine."

"Oh, I've no objection to your making an examination if you wish to."

Tompkins stepped at once and quickly toward the stall occupied by the old plug. He did not even take the trouble to ask which of the horses in the stable was Mayfair.

He set his box on the floor near the stall, entered and began to feel of the horse's nose and throat.

A very little light came into the stall through a small window near the top. Frank could see the surgeon bend his head around so as to look well into the horse's face.

"He'll see that white spot on the nose," thought Frank, "and that'll deceive him."

This apparently proved to be the case, for the surgeon continued to feel the horse over without asking questions.

Once he turned his head as if to see whether Frank was looking. At that moment Frank pretended to be very busily engaged in paring his finger nails.

His head was bent down, but he kept his eyes nevertheless upon Tompkins. The veterinary ran his hand under the blanket near the animal's neck and presently came out and picked up his box.

"You're quite right, Mr. Merriwell," he said, hastily, "the horse is in good condition. Good-evening."

"Good-evening, doctor," responded Frank, without stirring.

The moment he had left the stable Frank turned to Ephraim.

"Eph," he said, "run over to the hotel and get the address of the best veterinary surgeon at the Downs; then go and get that surgeon and bring him here in a hurry.

"Col. Harding's plug may not be worth much, but I don't want him to die on my hands."

"What's the matter?" gasped Ephraim.

"Never mind, but hurry after a surgeon."

Ephraim went out on the dead run. He was not gone many minutes, but before he returned the old plug had shown serious symptoms of illness.

Frank led him out from the stall, removed the blanket and did what he could for him, but he was certain that the sickness would demand the skillful attention of a surgeon.

When Ephraim came back he brought a surgeon with him.

"They told me tew go for Dr. Hardy, Frank, and here he is."

"And here's your patient, doctor," said Frank.

"Why it's one of Col. Harding's horses!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Yes. He was taken ill not more than ten minutes ago."

"One of the oldest horses in the stable," continued the doctor, who was beginning to make an examination. "He's run many a good race in his day, but it's a long time since he was worth anything."

Dr. Hardy continued to make remarks about the

past career of the horse while he worked; presently he exclaimed:

"In my opinion, this horse has been drugged!"

"I was waiting for you to say so," responded Frank "and if you hadn't discovered it pretty soon I should have told you my suspicions."

"What led you to suspect it, sir?"

Then Frank told him about the call of Dr. Tompkins.

"Tompkins," snorted Dr. Hardy, "he may be a good surgeon, but he's the worst swindler that ever infested a race track; you say he put his hand up under the horse's blanket?"

"Yes."

"Then I'd like to bet a hundred dollars that he had a hypodermic syringe in his hand and gave the horse a dose under his skin. It's lucky you sent for me as soon as you did for now there is time to save the beast."

"And it's lucky," thought Frank, "that I had the idea of transferring Mayfair to another stall, for if I hadn't done so it might be Mayfair whose life was in danger instead of Col. Harding's old plug."

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A NOISY NIGHT.

Dr. Hardy worked with a will and in the course of a couple of hours pronounced the horse out of danger. Frank then gave him a handsome fee for his services and asked him to say nothing about the matter.

"That will be impossible," said Hardy, "for any number of people saw your friend come for me and they'll suppose that it was your horse Mayfair that was in trouble; what shall I tell them when they ask me?"

"Well," Frank answered, "I don't want any lies told about the matter. I thought at first that it might be as well to let people suspect, if they would, that Mayfair had been injured, but that would affect the betting on the race and might lead some people to think that I was up to some kind of a trick. You might as well tell the truth about it, doctor."

"It seems to me that would be better," responded Dr. Hardy, "and if you say so I'll take steps to have that rascal Tompkins arrested."

"No, I wouldn't go so far as that. It's perfectly certain that Tompkins wasn't alone in the matter."

"Oh, of course not; he was hired to come here."

"That being the case, then," said Frank, "I shouldn't think it worth while to arrest him, for it wouldn't make us secure against some other attempt of this kind."

"That's right, Mr. Merriwell. I could give a good guess, I'm thinking, as to who sent Tompkins on this rascally errand, but I presume likely enough you can guess as well as I."

"I think so, and unfortunately a guess wouldn't be strong enough to justify an arrest. We can't prove that anybody hired Tompkins to disable Mayfair, you see."

"Quite so."

"Then let it be plainly understood that you were called to attend to one of Col. Harding's horses; everybody will know then that Mayfair is uninjured and the people can suspect what they like."

All the members of the combine returned from dinner before Dr. Hardy had got through with his work. They were a good deal excited when they learned of the attempt to disable Mayfair and it hardly needs saying that they were immensely pleased when Frank told them how he had shifted the horses from stall to stall in fear that something of this kind might occur.

"What will they be afther tryin' next I dunno," exclaimed Barney Mulloy.

"I can't imagine," Frank answered, "and like enough they'll give it up now, for they must be aware that by this time we are suspicious and on the lookout."

Barney shook his head gravely.

"That kind of scoundrels," he said, "doesn't give up his dirty work, yez can be sure of that."

"What do you think yourself, then, Barney?"

"What do I think they'll be thryin', Frank? I

dunno, it's too much fer me nut, but I'm thinkin' we got to be on the lookout."

"We've already decided that, and, as I told you, three of us will sleep in the stable to-night."

"Three of yez, is it?"

"Certainly, the rest of you can go to the hotel."

"All right, thin, if yez say so, but I should think yez would want us to stand picket all 'round the stable."

"No, that would be carrying our suspicions too far. I think those of us who are inside can manage to keep Mayfair from coming to harm."

"You mustn't sleep too sound thin."

Barney spoke in a very solemn tone, and Frank suspected that there was something on the Irish boy's mind beyond what he was saying; he was about to ask him some questions when Rattleton, who was outside of the stable, called:

"Come here, Barney!"

Barney immediately went out, and Frank turned to the room that he had chosen to sleep in. It was getting near bedtime and partly for that reason and partly because he wanted to shut up the stable for the night, Frank advised his friends to go back to the hotel.

All except Ephraim were in a bunch near the watering trough near the stable yard.

"All right, we'll go on," they answered.

They immediately started slowly toward the hotel, all except Diamond, who came into the stable. There was a curious look of disgust on the Virginian's face.

"I s'pose, Frank," he said, "that it would be a good



scheme to look through the stable to make certain that there's nobody here before we turn in."

"I was going to ask Eph to do that," Frank responded.

"I'll do it myself," responded Diamond, "let Eph go to bed."

Eph had taken so much interest in looking after Mayfair, and he had worried so much about the attempted tricks that he was thoroughly tired.

Accordingly he did not need any stronger hint to go into his room, where he threw himself down upon the bed and almost immediately fell asleep.

Diamond made a thorough tour of the stable and at length, having closed the doors, came into Frank's room for a moment before going to his own.

"What's the matter, Jack?" asked Frank.

"Oh, nothing much," responded the Virginian.

"Yes there is, I could tell it in your face when you came in, and there's something in the tone of your voice now. Have you got wind of some new trick?"

"Well, not exactly."

"That's a queer answer, Jack."

"The trick has nothing to do with Mayfair," said Diamond, hastily. "I'm quite satisfied that there's nobody in the stable this minute who is unfriendly to your horse."

Frank looked queerly at his friend.

"Come, Jack," he said, "you're talking in riddles; explain yourself."

"Oh, it will be all explained soon enough," answered Diamond, with a smile, "I haven't any business to give

it away and I'm not going to do so, but I'm afraid you won't have a very peaceful night of it."

"Why?"

"Oh, the rest of the fellows have got a crazy idea that they want to put up a harmless job on Eph; he's a Vermont farm boy, you know, and they think that they can rattle him a little without doing any harm; they wanted me to come into the scheme, but I thought it was too childish."

"Great Scott! Jack," exclaimed Frank, "you're too dignified to live."

"I presumed you'd say something of that kind, but after a man has been a couple of years at college, it strikes me he might sober down a bit."

"Well, some of the other fellows haven't been at college so many years as you have, you know," said Frank, mischievously.

Diamond flushed a little.

"I don't mind a bit of fun," he said, "and the truth is I've done my share in this matter, but I won't say anything more about it. Good-night."

With this he went to his own room, and Frank lay down wondering what kind of a scheme the other fellows had cooked up for worrying Eph.

He was tired himself, and soon dropped to sleep without much further thought on the matter.

How long he had been asleep he could not tell, but when he was awakened it was by a loud crowing.

His first thought was that it was sunrise and that he had been awakened by barnyard fowls; then he observed that it was perfectly dark.

"Funny," he thought, "it isn't often that a rooster crows before daylight."

Then there came another crow, a very loud one, and it was accompanied by a lot of cackling and gobbling and clucking as if an entire poultry show had been set down beside the stable.

"It must be morning," he said to himself, and was about to arise when he heard a stirring in the next room, which was occupied by Ephraim. The Vermonter had got out of bed and was muttering to himself.

"Gol darn it!" Frank heard him say, "seems es ef I hedn't hed no sleep at all and here 'tis morning. Thunder'n loud voices Col. Harding's hens and roosters have, seems tew me.

"Jimminy! they wake up early tew; here 'tis so dark I can't see my way."

The noise of crowing and gobbling ceased for an instant only to begin again with greater vigor.

Frank chuckled and lay back on his bed. Ephraim was evidently hunting for a lantern.

"Hang it," he exclaimed, "where did I put the thing? I was sartin I sot it on this chair; 'tain't here now."

A vociferous crow came then. It was so near that it seemed as if it might be in Ephraim's room.

"Gosh all hemlock!" muttered the Vermonter, "I'd like to wring that bird's neck. He's got voice enough to sing bass in the village choir."

"I'll have to take a hand in this," thought Frank, so he called aloud:

"Ephraim! Oh, I say, Eph, wake up, will you?"

"I am awake," returned the Vermonter, impatiently. "Do yeou suppose I could sleep with all thet clatter going on?"

"What clatter?"

"Why, didn't you hear——"

The rest of his remark was lost in a wild chorus of crows. They seemed to come from all over the stable. When they ceased Frank called quietly:

"I heard a rooster crow somewhere and suppose it must be daylight; it's time you gave Mayfair a pail of water, isn't it?"

"Well, I can't find my lantern. I never did hear sech noises in any barn I was ever in afore."

"Cock-a-doodle-do!" screamed Ephraim's bass rooster.

"Dew hear that!" exclaimed the Vermonter. "I'd bet a doughnut thet bird weighs forty pounds."

"See here, Eph," said Frank, seriously, "I don't believe you shut the stable door tight; I think those birds are inside."

"There weren't any in the stable when I went to bed," returned Ephraim, confidently.

"Well, they're here now!" insisted Frank. "You'd better find your lantern and drive them out."

"But I can't find my lantern anywhere!"

"Then go out without it."

"Gosh, I guess I'll have tew."

Ephraim felt his way across the room to the door, opened it and went out. His ears were immediately deafened by another chorus of crows and gobbles.

"Jerusalem!" he muttered, "the barn's full of 'em; how will I ever drive them out?"

Then he started in the direction of the loudest crow, shuffling his feet along the floor and crying:

"Shoo, Biddy, shoo!"

Frank lay on his bed almost suffocating with his effort to keep from laughing out loud.

"The fellows will surely give themselves away for laughing," he thought.

There was a moment of silence and then Ephraim called in a plaintive tone:

"I say, Frank."

"Well, what's the matter?" responded Frank, as soberly as he could.

"They seem tew be up in the hay loft," said Ephraim, "and I don't believe I can get them all out alone."

"Oh thunder and Mars! What are you good for? I thought you were brought up on a farm," said Frank. "I'm sleepy, go ahead and rout them out or we won't get another wink the rest of the night."

Ephraim growled something to the effect that it would take forty farm hands to clear out a stable invaded by so many fowl. Then Frank heard him climbing a ladder to the hay loft.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### IN DANGER.

As Ephraim went up the ladder the chorus of crows and cackles became louder. He heard a great rustling in the hay, too.

When he arrived at the top he stood still for a moment. He began to suspect that something was wrong.

"See here!" he exclaimed presently, "yeou thundering idiots, get out of this, yeou understand? I know what yeou're up tew. I know yeour voice, Bruce Browning, yeou crow like a caow."

The answer to this was a wild whoop, wholly unlike any sound ever heard in a barnyard.

"Dad bim yeou!" cried Ephraim, "yeou can't scare me! There ain't no Injuns around here, and ef yeou hedn't stole my lantern I'd hunt yeou up thundering quick and pitch yeou over the edge to the stable floor, I would, hang me ef I wouldn't."

There was another chorus of wild yells from different parts of the stable.

Hearing a particularly loud rustling in the hay close by, Ephraim made a jump for the spot. He caught hold of somebody's foot and held on like grim death.

The one who had been caught struggled hard to get away, but Ephraim clung and presently they were wrestling and striking at each other in the dark and



in great danger of pitching one or the other over the edge of the loft to the floor.

Frank thought that the joke had gone far enough and left his room to put a stop to it.

He went out to the stable floor, but before he had spoken he heard Rattleton's excited voice shouting:

"Frank! Frank! The farn's abire; I mean the barn's afire!"

"What?" cried Frank, making a dash for the ladder to the hay loft.

"I smell smoke," answered Rattleton.

"So do I," said the deep voice of Bruce Browning.

"Have you fellows been monkeying with matches up in the hay there?" demanded Frank, angrily.

"No," cried Hodge, from another corner, "we thought of that and every one of us emptied his pockets of matches before Diamond let us in."

It was no time then to ask after the causes of the fire, for Frank himself distinguished a strong smell of smoke. His first thought was for Mayfair.

He had known of many stable fires where, owing to the fright the horses took, it was impossible to get them out of their stalls.

His heart sank as he thought of the possibility of his splendid thoroughbred, as well as all the horses belonging to Col. Harding, might be roasted alive.

It flashed upon him, too, that this might be another trick of the scoundrelly Leech. No matter what was the explanation, the calamity must be averted somehow.

"Where does it come from, boys?" he called, as he mounted the ladder to the loft.

"Up this way," answered Rattleton. "Upon my word the hay is burning right around me!"

All the boys came running as fast as they could through the darkness to the spot where Rattleton had been concealed.

Most of the combine had crawled into the hay in various places about the stable, intending to cover their heads over if Ephraim should find a lantern and go around searching for the barnyard fowl that disturbed him.

Rattleton was in a far corner of the loft just under the roof. About ten feet from him was a window looking out upon the southern side of the stable and about as far in the other direction was another window looking toward the west.

As Frank hurried across the loft he saw a faint flash of light at the south window. That was enough to tell him that the fire had been set from the outside.

Rattleton was mistaken in thinking that hay was burning around him. The fact was that some straw set against the stable wall outside was afire, igniting the woodwork, and threatening, of course, to destroy the whole building.

The wind was blowing from that direction and even as he crossed the loft two or three sparks came flying in. It seemed that they went out before they reached the hay, but the terrible danger was plain.

"Eph," called Frank, "find a lantern in my room

and run the horses out. Take Col. Harding's out before you touch Mayfair."

Eph scrambled down the ladder to obey, but before he reached the floor Diamond was at work ahead of him.

Jack had remained in his room during the crowing and had not stirred until he heard the cry of fire; then he had jumped up, lit his own lantern, and rushed to Mayfair's stall.

Frank's command, therefore, was disregarded in one respect; the first horse to be led from the stable was his own thoroughbred.

Then while Eph and Diamond continued to look after the horses, and having a hard time of it because the animals got more and more excited with every minute, Frank and the other boys worked to save the stable.

At the risk of suffocation Frank put his head out of the south window and saw the pile of straw was burning there. It was a loose pile and nearly burned out, but it had caught on the wood and tiny flames were beginning to lick their way upward.

"Barney and Hodge," he exclaimed, as he drew in his head, "get down to my room and get the chemical fire buckets there; take them right around and douse that flame!"

The two boys thus addressed hurried away. Frank knew that the flames could be easily subdued by one throw from the chemical buckets, but that would be useless to save the stable if, meantime, the hay should catch fire.

Accordingly he ran to the west window, threw it open and ordered the other boys to begin to pitch the hay away from the window at the south and throw it out of that at the west.

Even as he spoke a spark came in, dropped upon the hay at his feet and a little blaze immediately started. Frank caught it in his hands, scorching his palms, but putting the blaze out.

Then he gathered up a great armful of the hay, carried it over to the west window and dropped it to the ground. The other boys followed suit.

More than one spark fell as they worked and more than one pair of hands was scorched as they worked to keep the hay from burning.

Every tiny blaze sent up a volume of smoke that choked their lungs and made their eyes water. Still they worked heroically, stumbling against each other, panting for fresh air and every one of them in danger of being suffocated and burned alive if they should not succeed in keeping the hay from getting on fire.

If it had once caught it is not probable that one of them could have reached a place of safety. Not one of them, however, so much as thought of giving up the effort, but it seemed to them and to Frank, too, as if Hodge and Barney would never get around the stable with the fire pails.

It was not far that they had to go, but it took time and every second counted.

At last, just when Frank himself began to despair of being able to put out the constant inflow of sparks,

there was a shout of triumph from beneath the southern window.

Barney and Hodge had arrived there with their fire pails and one well directed douse had put the flames out completely.

The shower of sparks ceased suddenly and the stable was saved.

The boys in the loft crowded to the windows to get fresh air and as they stood there they heard cries of "fire!" from a distance and heard men running up to their rescue.

The flames had been seen by somebody and an alarm given, but long before the neighbors had come up to help, the fire was out. No damage of consequence had been done, but it was evident that the entire building would have gone to the ground if it had not been for the quick and desperate efforts of Frank and his companions.

When the facts were known it was agreed by all, not only the Yale Combine, but the people who were living at the Downs, that an attempt had been made to burn the stable in the hope of injuring Mayfair, and thus preventing him from running for the Darley plate.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE RACE WON.

"It was a mighty good thing," remarked Frank, after the horses had been put back into their stalls and the neighbors had gone away, "that you fellows put up a joke on Eph."

"Ahem! ahem!" coughed Rattleton, with an air of great importance. "The members of the Yale Combine never do anything that isn't exactly right. I'd have you understand, Capt. Merriwell, that in the words of an ancient and well-known mariner, you command a right good crew."

"Well, I do, and I'm in earnest," responded Frank, seriously. "The joke was a good one, as I think Eph himself will admit, but the point is, that if you fellows hadn't been in the stable——"

He paused and shook his head gravely. Eph answered for him.

"The barn would hev burned up!" he said, emphatically.

"And Mayfair wouldn't have had any chance for the Darley plate," added Diamond.

"That's it," said Frank, "and now that this danger is over we'll just quiet down and wait for the next one. All this makes me more and more determined to run in that race and win it, too!"



"You vill do it, Vrankie!" exclaimed Hans, "don't let me make no mistakes dat about alreatty."

Frank smiled good-humoredly, and as the boys were wildly excited still, he made no objection to their plan of keeping watch around the stable during the rest of the night.

They did so, but without any result, for nothing whatever happened, and during the next two or three days, although the strictest watch was kept at all hours, none of them could see that any further attempt was made to disable Mayfair.

It really looked as if Leech and his gang of crooks had given up the effort.

Meantime Frank saw Leech once or twice, but had only a few words with him. It was impossible for Frank to make any accusation against the horseman, and the latter made no more remark than something to the effect that Mayfair had had a narrow escape just as Jupiter had.

There was an evil gleam in Leech's eyes when he spoke and Frank was perfectly certain that he had been back of all the attempts upon Mayfair, but nothing could be said about it, for there was no proof to offer.

The day on which the race was to be run came at last and there was the usual crowd at Churchill Downs.

"The Darley plate for gentlemen riders" was the fourth on the programme. Previous to its occurrence most of the boys in the combine had a pleasant surprise.

It was just before the second race and they were

gathered in a group by the rail to watch it, when one of them asked wonderingly where Diamond was.

He was certainly not among them, and, thinking that he had gone back to the stable to be with Frank and Mayfair, they gave their attention to the horses who were at that time prancing up and down and skirmishing for position.

One of the jockeys was evidently much taller than the others; thus he attracted their attention and after looking at him a moment Rattleton exclaimed:

"Why, bless my stars, there's Jack!"

The other boys stared in wonder for a moment. It was Diamond and no mistake.

The jockey who had been slated to ride the horse Diamond was on had injured himself slightly and Diamond, hearing of it, had begged for permission to ride in his place.

The owner of the horse had given a rather unwilling consent and now Diamond was in all his glory, cantering about the track perfectly at home in the saddle and longing to win.

When the horses got away it did not look as if there was much of a chance for him to come out ahead, for he had not descended to employ any of the usual tricks of jockeys for getting a good position.

He was far outside and somewhat in the rear when the starter dropped the flag and the horses began the race in earnest.

He showed his skill as a rider almost before he was halfway around, and when it came to the home stretch

it could be seen that Diamond had as good a chance as the rest of them.

Down the course they thundered, kicking up a great cloud of dust that obscured the losing horses. Three or four were in the van neck and neck.

When they passed the spot where the Yale Combine stood the boys sent up a great yell.

"Bully for you, Jack! Yale forever!"

Jack did not so much as turn his eyes in their direction, but he heard their call, and it seemed to give him greater nerve, for he lay far down upon his horse, dug the spurs in and the next instant passed under the wire just a neck in the lead.

It was a narrow margin, but it was sufficient, and Jack returned to his companions elated with victory.

The owner of the horse, who had never expected to win more than a place in the contest, offered Diamond a hundred dollars as a fee for his success.

Diamond at first proudly refused it, but thought better of it and took the money, passing it over immediately to the injured jockey in whose place he had ridden.

The third race was without interest for the boys and they let it pass without looking at it; they went over to the stable in a body, where Frank was waiting for the summons to take Mayfair to the course.

The summons came at length and when he rode out upon the track from the paddock there was a generous burst of applause from the grand stand.

There was no doubt that the great majority of people there wished him to win, and from the way the bets

stood in the betting ring there was no doubt a great deal of confidence that the Northern horse would be a winner.

Leech's Jupiter had his admirers, however, and accordingly the betting was about even between the two.

There were four or five other horses in the race, but they hardly counted; it was known that they had no chance against Jupiter and the owners were riding merely for the love of sport and to decide which of their horses was better than the other without respect to the winning of the plate.

Several false starts were made.

At the first one Frank stopped his horse before the starter had given the call to come back. This was because Leech had spurred his horse far into the lead in his anxiety to get the advantage.

The spectators saw and understood this and there were not a few hisses at Leech's conduct.

Frank said nothing. His face never changed its expression, but he rode gently back to the line, wheeled about and started down again with the others.

This time Leech was a little more careful, but, nevertheless, at the last minute he did ride his horse ahead of the others and got it squarely in the way of Mayfair.

Frank rode on, thinking that possibly the word would be given to go, but the bell sounded, and as the jockeys rode back to their posts, the starter warned Leech not to attempt any unfair trick.

Leech responded angrily that Jupiter was out for a race and that it was hard to hold him ;—

"If you can't hold him in," the starter retorted, "you must get a rider that can."

Leech scowled but said nothing in reply. He knew that he was unpopular and that the judges at Churchill would be only too glad to find some excuse for ruling him off the course.

The other false starts were due to the mistakes of the other riders, and were without consequence excepting as they delayed the event.

At length the horses got away in a fairly even bunch. There was a lot of applause from the grand stand to show that the spectators were satisfied that the conditions were fair.

The race was to be once around the course.

Frank held Mayfair in during the first half of it with the result that his horse was almost out of sight in the field that was straggling some lengths behind Jupiter.

Leech glanced over his shoulder to measure the distance between himself and Frank and then lay down upon his horse, digging the spurs in as if determined to get such a lead that Mayfair could not possibly overtake him.

Frank knew his steed well. He knew that he was good for half a mile at top speed, and he accordingly patted the horse on the neck and whispered familiar words to him.

There was no need of using the spurs; the thoroughbred dashed forward and at the first effort began to close the gap between himself and Jupiter.

The audience that had been watching the contest

with some doubt had now begun to cheer wildly, for they saw that Mayfair was unquestionably the better horse and that it was sure to win.

Around the three-quarter curve they came, and when they entered the home stretch Mayfair had come up with Jupiter and was passing him with apparent ease.

The field was hopelessly behind.

Frank was determined that the victory should be a complete one, and he, therefore, did not spare his horse as they came down the stretch.

He could have allowed Mayfair to let up to a moderate canter and still pass under the wire ahead, but he made up his mind that the distance between him and Jupiter should be as great as possible.

Accordingly he kept the pace and the lead increased with every stride.

The big crowd was howling itself hoarse at the victory of the favorite when to everybody's surprise and horror, Mayfair veered suddenly to one side and then stood up on his hind legs with a frightfully loud neigh.

Frank was pitched to the ground head downward. No rider could have kept his saddle under such circumstances.

Worst of all his foot caught in the stirrup so that he could not free himself and there was danger that he would be trampled to death by the excited thoroughbred.

As Frank fell, Leech sprang forward directly toward the prostrate lad.

Then another shout went up from the spectators. It



was as plain as day that Leech in his anger intended to run his rival down.

That he did not succeed in doing this was due wholly to the excitement of Mayfair. The horse came down on his fore feet, gave one wild prance, and then jumped to the side of the course.

As Frank's foot was still caught in the stirrup he was dragged across the ground and so just escaped the pounding of Jupiter's hoofs.

Mayfair staggered up against the railing and stood there panting and trembling while Jupiter thundered past and crossed under the line an apparent winner, while the field straggled up and stopped beside the fallen rider.

Then there was the wildest excitement.

It was found that Frank was not injured beyond a few bruises of no importance, but the excitement continued because there were so many who had plunged heavily on the race and had lost when victory seemed to be in their grasp.

Then word came that bets were not to be paid until the judges had made an investigation.

This was done at Frank's demand, for as soon as he had had his foot unfastened from the stirrup, he made an examination of Mayfair that convinced him that another trick had been played and that this time it had succeeded.

There was a tiny wound upon Mayfair's left shoulder.

The result of the investigation showed that this wound had been made by a bullet from an air gun



held by Dr. Tompkins who had stood by himself at the rail a little distance up the course.

The plan was, if it seemed certain that Mayfair was to win, that he should fire at the horse with the intention of doing exactly what he had done, that is, causing Mayfair to halt.

Tompkins had thought that he could make a wound that would not be seen, but in his anxiety to succeed he had charged his gun too heavily.

The result was that the blood trickled from the horse thus showing what had been done, and when the air gun was found across from the spot where Mayfair had reared, it was not difficult to trace it to Tompkins' hands.

The other steps in the investigation followed with equal certainty to the end that it was proven that Leech had conspired with Tompkins, Terry and one or two other scoundrels to disable Mayfair.

Consequently the Darley plate was awarded to Mayfair and all bets were ordered settled on that basis.

This decision satisfied everybody unless it was Leech himself, who was ruled off the Churchill Downs course forever.

A few days later Frank's horse was as well as ever, and then the boy entered another race just to show what Mayfair could do.

Frank's horse came in first with ease, beating the time of the other race by several seconds.

"He's a dandy steed," said Diamond, and hundreds of others said the same.

It was not long after this that the combine left

Louisville for other parts of Kentucky, and then moved onward to Virginia where Frank Merriwell's skill was still further demonstrated.

And now, let us ring down the curtain, wishing Frank Merriwell and his chums good luck.

**THE END.**



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